

Q.1) "There is a growing trend of heart attacks among India's youth. What are the key social and lifestyle factors behind this, and what preventive measures can be taken?" (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

Heart attacks, once considered a health issue of the elderly, are increasingly affecting young Indians **under 40**. This alarming trend is closely tied to changing **lifestyles, social habits**, and rising **physical and mental stress levels** in contemporary India.

Body

Key Social and Lifestyle Factors

1. Sedentary Lifestyle and Lack of Exercise:

Prolonged sitting and minimal physical activity weaken cardiovascular health.

Example: A **2022 ICMR study** found that over **70%** of Indian youth do not meet **WHO's** recommended physical activity levels.

2. Unhealthy Diet and Fast Food Culture:

High intake of processed, high-fat, and sugar-rich foods contributes to obesity and cholesterol.

Example: The rise of online food delivery apps has led to a **35%** increase in junk food consumption among urban youth (**FSSAI 2023**).

3. Increased Stress and Work Pressure:

Long working hours, job insecurity, and academic pressure elevate stress hormones.

Example: A **Lancet report in 2022** linked stress to a **1.6x** higher risk of heart attacks in youth **aged 25–40**.

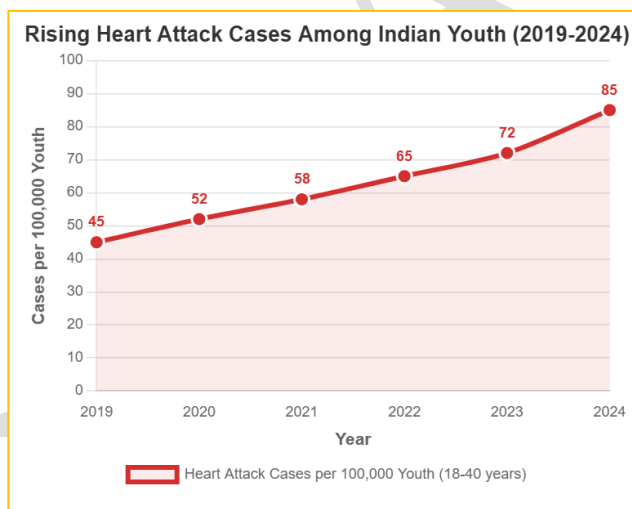
4. Smoking, Alcohol, and Substance Abuse:

Early onset of these habits damages blood vessels and heart function.

5. Sleep Deprivation and Irregular Sleep Patterns:

Disrupted circadian rhythms affect heart rate, blood pressure, and hormonal balance.

Example: AIIMS studies show that youth sleeping less than 6 hours have a **50%** higher risk of heart-related conditions.



6. Ignoring Preventive Health Checkups: Low awareness and a culture of neglect delay early detection of risk factors.

Example: Only **12%** of young Indians undergo regular cardiac screening, as per a 2023 Apollo Health report.

Preventive Measures

- 1. Encourage daily physical activity:** WHO recommends at least **150 minutes** of moderate exercise per week for adults.
- 2. Promote heart-healthy diets:** ICMR suggests limiting trans-fats, added sugars, and sodium while increasing fibre and fresh produce intake.
- 3. Strengthen stress management efforts:** Institutions should integrate yoga, meditation, and counseling services as per Ministry of AYUSH guidelines.
- 4. Increase access to health screening:** WHO and ICMR recommend **annual checkups** for those over 30 to detect early cardiac risks.

Conclusion

A multi-pronged approach involving health education, lifestyle reform, and preventive care is essential. As per the **Indian Heart Association**, over **50% of heart attacks** in Indians occur **under the age of 50** — a trend that can be reversed with timely and collective action.

Q.2) "Do you think India is prepared for a greying nation as its youth dividend fades? Examine the challenges of an ageing population and suggest sustainable policy responses." (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

India is home to over **140 million** elderly citizens, a number expected to **double by 2050**. While the country enjoys a **demographic dividend** today, the shift toward an ageing population poses complex social, economic, and healthcare challenges.

Body

India's Readiness for a Greying Nation**1. Limited Elderly-Centric**

Infrastructure: India lacks adequate old-age homes, geriatric care units, and age-friendly urban spaces. Example: As per Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI), only **5%** of hospitals have dedicated geriatric wards.

2. Inadequate Pension and Social

Security Coverage: Majority of the elderly remain outside formal pension systems, especially in unorganised sectors. Example: NSSO data shows that only **25%** of India's elderly receive any form of pension.

3. Healthcare System Not Age-Inclusive: Geriatric care is not integrated into primary health services, leading to untreated chronic conditions.

Example: India has less than **one geriatrician per lakh** population (Indian Journal of Geriatric Care, 2022).

4. Rising Mental Health Concerns: Loneliness, depression, and neglect are rising among the elderly.

Example: A **2021 HelpAge India** report found that **over 60%** of elders feel they are a burden to their families.

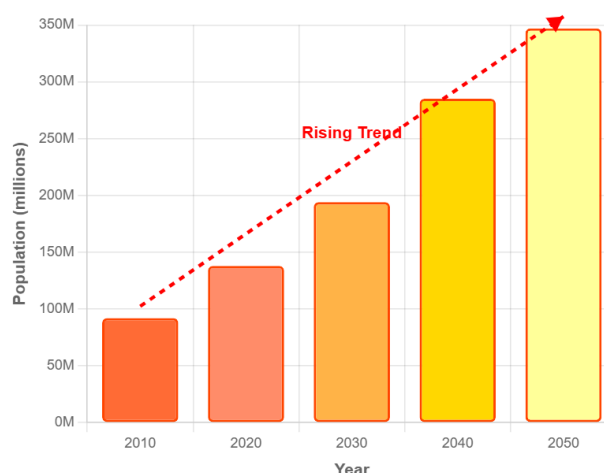
However, India has the time and tools to adapt to this transition.

Emerging Support Systems and Opportunities

- 1. Growing Focus on Geriatric Policy:** Schemes like National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE) are being scaled up.
- 2. Role of Technology and Telemedicine:** Platforms like e-Sanjeevani are bridging the healthcare gap for elders in remote areas.
- 3. Expanding Role of Civil Society:** NGOs and private players are launching elderly helplines, companionship programs, and wellness centres.
- 4. Elderly as Human Capital:** Many seniors are skilled, experienced, and willing to contribute in part-time or advisory roles post-retirement.

India's Elderly Population Growth

Population aged 60 and above (in millions)



Challenges of an Ageing Population

1. **Economic Dependency:** Increasing number of dependents burdens the working population and social support systems.
Example: Old Age Dependency Ratio is projected to double from **14.2% (2021) to 28.2% by 2050 (UNFPA Report)**.
2. **Rising Healthcare Costs:** Chronic illnesses, disabilities, and medication costs strain both families and public health expenditure.
Example: WHO estimates India's elderly healthcare burden to rise by over **400%** in two decades.
3. **Breakdown of Traditional Family Support:** Urban migration and nuclear families leave many elders without caregivers.
Example: According to **Census 2011**, nearly **15 million** elderly live alone or with only a spouse.
4. **Social Isolation and Elder Abuse:** Many seniors face neglect or abuse, especially women.
Example: HelpAge India's 2023 survey found **1 in 3 elderly** had experienced some form of abuse.

Sustainable Policy Responses

1. **Universal Pension Reforms:** Introduce a robust universal old-age pension scheme indexed to inflation, building on Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme and **PM Vaya Vandana Yojana**.
2. **Geriatric Healthcare Integration:** Include elderly care in **Ayushman Bharat**, train more geriatric professionals, and strengthen the National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly.
3. **Promote Age-Friendly Urban Design:** Mandate accessible public spaces, housing, and transport under AMRUT and Smart Cities, guided by **WHO's Age-Friendly Cities** framework.
4. **Community-Based and Assistive Support:** Expand senior citizen homes, distribute aids under **Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana**, and promote dignity through initiatives like Vayoshreshtha Samman.

Conclusion

India stands at a demographic crossroads. As the youth dividend tapers, the ageing challenge must be met with foresight, compassion, and innovation. According to the **Economic Survey**

2022, now is the time to invest in "**Silver economy**" strategies — not just to support the elderly but to ensure inclusive and resilient national development.

Q.3) "Urbanisation in India has often overlooked the needs of the poor. Examine the key challenges faced by the urban poor and suggest practical solutions for inclusive urban development."(150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

India is urbanising rapidly, with over **35%** of the population now living in cities. However, this growth has been uneven, often marginalising the urban poor in terms of housing, services, and opportunities—threatening the goal of inclusive urbanisation.

Body

Challenges Faced by the Urban Poor

- 1. Inadequate Housing:** Most urban poor live in slums or informal settlements with poor infrastructure and insecurity of tenure. Example: Over **65 million people** live in slums, as per the 2011 Census.
- 2. Lack of Basic Services:** Access to clean water, sanitation, electricity, and waste disposal is limited or absent in many poor urban areas. Example: **National Family Health Survey-5** shows urban poor have lower access to piped water than the urban average.
- 3. Informal Employment and Low Wages:** A large portion of the urban poor work in informal jobs with no social security or legal protection. Example: Periodic Labour Force Survey (2022) shows over **70%** of urban workers are informally employed.
- 4. Health Vulnerabilities:** Poor living conditions and lack of health facilities make them prone to communicable and lifestyle diseases. Example: COVID-19 disproportionately affected urban slums due to cramped spaces and poor hygiene.
- 5. Educational Disparities:** Children from poor urban families often drop out or study in under-resourced schools. Example: **ASER reports** show large learning gaps between children in slums and those in formal housing.
- 6. Risk of Displacement:** Slum demolitions and redevelopment often exclude or displace the poor without proper rehabilitation. Example: **Delhi's Yamuna floodplain evictions** in 2023 left hundreds without shelter or relocation.

Inclusive Urban Development: Practical Solutions

1. **Affordable Housing Schemes:** Expand rental housing and upgrade existing slums under PMAY-U with participatory planning.
2. **Urban Employment Guarantee:** Implement schemes like MGNREGA for urban areas to provide work and income stability.
3. **Inclusive Public Services:** Ensure last-mile access to water, sanitation, healthcare, and education through urban local bodies.
4. **Legal Recognition and Tenure Security:** Provide property rights or occupancy certificates to slum dwellers to avoid forced evictions.
5. **Skill Development and Formalisation:** Link urban poor to skill centres and facilitate transition to formal sector jobs under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana.
6. **Strengthen Local Governance:** Empower municipalities with funds and community engagement tools for pro-poor city planning.

Conclusion

Inclusive urbanisation is key to a just and sustainable India. As per **NITI Aayog's Urban Planning Report (2021)**, empowering local bodies, expanding housing, and ensuring services for all can make cities more equitable and future-ready.

Q.4) "Despite impressive economic growth, human development in India remains uneven and inadequate. Critically examine the reasons behind this mismatch and suggest measures to bridge the gap." (250 words, 15 marks)

Introduction

India's GDP grew at a robust rate of **7.6%** in 2023–24, making it one of the world's fastest-growing economies. However, its Human Development Index (HDI) ranking remains low at **134 (UNDP 2023)**, revealing deep gaps in health, education, and equity.

Body**Causes Behind the Mismatch**

1. **Unequal Distribution of Growth:** Economic benefits are concentrated in urban and industrial areas, leaving rural and tribal regions behind.

Example: States like **Kerala** fare much better on HDI than states like **Bihar or Jharkhand**.

- 2. Jobless Growth:** Economic expansion has not translated into proportional employment, especially in the formal sector.
Example: **PLFS (2023–24)** shows youth unemployment in urban areas above **15%**, despite GDP growth.
- 3. Underinvestment in Social Sectors:** Public spending on health and education remains below global benchmarks.
Example: India spends only around **2.1% of GDP** on health and **2.9%** on education (Economic Survey 2023–24).
- 4. Regional and Gender Disparities:** Access to health, education, and income opportunities varies significantly by region and gender.
Example: **NFHS-5** highlights poor female labour force participation and child nutrition in backward states.
- 5. Weak Governance and Implementation:** Leakages, inefficiencies, and corruption often dilute the impact of welfare schemes.
Example: Delay in implementation of **National Education Policy (NEP)** reforms in several states.
- 6. Environmental and Climate Stresses:** Climate change and pollution affect poor communities the most, reversing human development gains.
Example: Heatwaves and droughts in central India have impacted livelihoods and health indicators.

Measures to Bridge the Gap

- 1. Boost Public Investment in Social Infrastructure:** Increase allocations for health, education, and nutrition through targeted schemes.
Recommendation: Follow **WHO norms of 5% GDP** for health and **UNESCO's 6%** for education.
- 2. Promote Inclusive Economic Policies:** Encourage labour-intensive and rural industries to spread growth benefits widely.
Recommendation: Support MSMEs and expand schemes like **SVANidhi** and **PMEGP**.
- 3. Strengthen Decentralised Governance:** Empower Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies for better implementation of welfare programmes.
Recommendation: Use local data for need-based planning and monitoring.

4. Bridge Regional and Social Gaps: Focus on backward districts through **Aspirational Districts Programme** and gender-sensitive budgeting.

Recommendation: Expand scholarships, maternity benefits, and nutrition schemes for vulnerable groups.

5. Skill Development and Job Creation: Align skill training with market needs and boost employment in health, education, and green sectors.

Recommendation: Strengthen **PMKVY** and expand public sector recruitment in underserved areas.

6. Monitor and Evaluate Human Development Indicators: Create robust feedback loops and social audits to measure impact regularly.

Recommendation: Use **HDI and MPI** (Multidimensional Poverty Index) at the district level for planning.

Conclusion

India's economic growth must translate into meaningful improvements in people's lives. As per **UNDP**, bridging this gap requires prioritising inclusive development, investing in people, and empowering local governance to deliver last-mile justice and prosperity.

Q.5) "Smaller cities in India—Tier-2 and Tier-3—are emerging as new growth hubs. Critically analyse the opportunities and challenges they present in ensuring balanced urban development." (250 words, 15 marks)

Introduction

Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities are urban centres with **smaller populations** and relatively lower infrastructure than metros, but **high growth potential**. Their rise in recent years presents a significant opportunity for balanced development, though not without major challenges.

Body

Opportunities Presented by Smaller Cities

1. Economic Decentralisation: These cities help reduce pressure on metros by attracting industries and startups.

Example: **Coimbatore and Jaipur** have become IT and textile hubs, easing load off **Bengaluru and Delhi**.

2. Lower Cost Advantage: Affordable land and living costs attract businesses and migrant talent.

Example: Many startups are relocating from **Mumbai** to cities like **Nashik and Nagpur** for cost savings.

3. Improved Quality of Life: Better air quality, lower congestion, and community living appeal to the middle class.

Example: Cities like **Bhubaneswar and Kochi** rank high on livability indices.

4. Government Push and Infrastructure Boost: Schemes like **AMRUT, Smart Cities Mission**, and PM Gati Shakti are prioritising these areas.

Example: **Indore's** transformation under the Smart Cities Mission showcases this impact.

However, Challenges Persist in Realising This Potential.

Key Challenges

1. Inadequate Urban Planning: Unplanned growth leads to haphazard construction and traffic issues.

Example: Cities like **Patna and Kanpur** face poor drainage and road congestion due to rapid expansion.

2. Strained Infrastructure: Water, waste, and power systems are often outdated or overstressed.

Example: **Varanasi** struggles with sewage treatment despite tourism-driven growth.

3. Limited Administrative Capacity: Urban local bodies often lack skilled manpower and financial autonomy.

Example: Smaller ULBs face delays in executing Smart City projects due to lack of expertise.

4. Social Disparities and Informal Growth: Slum expansion and exclusion of migrant labour remain under-addressed.

Example: **Surat's** outer regions have high concentrations of informal settlements with poor civic services.

Measures to Ensure Balanced Urban Development

1. Strengthen Urban Governance: Build capacity of local bodies and ensure participatory planning processes.

Recommendation: Devolve **3Fs** (functions, funds, functionaries) as per **74th Constitutional Amendment**.

2. Promote Sustainable Infrastructure: Invest in green public transport, waste recycling, and renewable energy.

Recommendation: Encourage solar rooftops, e-buses, and decentralized waste systems.

3. Digital and Economic Inclusion: Support digital literacy and access to formal employment for all.

Recommendation: Skill-building under **PMKVY and Digital India** can reduce inequality.

4. Develop Regional Planning Mechanisms: Align district, state, and urban plans for cohesive development.

Recommendation: **Metropolitan planning committees** and regional master plans must be empowered.

Conclusion

Smaller cities are key to India's next phase of urban growth. With effective governance, infrastructure investment, and inclusive policies, they can bridge the rural-urban divide. **NITI Aayog** stresses their role in achieving sustainable and balanced urbanisation.