

Reproductive culture and young generations: communication strategies of fertility preservation

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Background

Infertility affects about 50 to 80 million couples worldwide. In developed countries, between 8% and 12% of all couples will experience some form of infertility during their reproductive lives (WHO, 2001). Fertility preservation and fertility threats are not only a global fact but also a complex and slippery phenomenon. It appears to be related to a larger set of primary and secondary causes that are, at the same time, medical, cultural and social. This paper will investigate the issue of fertility preservation in terms of awareness of infertility risks in young Italian population, aiming at designing an innovative preservation strategy.

Average age of mothers at childbirth*



*Data: UN 2009

Methods

The research is based on an integrated methodology that uses:

Quantitative approach based on **CATIs, focus groups and in-depth interviews with patients and experts**. The quantitative phase took place in 2005 and addressed 2000 persons: 1000 between 18 and 30 years old and 1000 between 31 and 60 years old. The two groups have been sampled in order to be representative of Italian population and the focus was on infertility awareness and sensitivity.

The **qualitative part (2008-2010)** is based on in-depth interviews and focus groups and involved 65 subjects. Focus groups have been used to ask directly patients with fertility problems and to investigate knowledge and awareness of high school students (17-18 y.o.) about fertility preservation. The qualitative phase of the research has been financially supported by the Italian Ministry of Health and has been conducted in cooperation with the Istituto Superiore della Sanità.

Results

Surveys showed a very high lack of sensitivity and of knowledge about fertility preservation and potential threats. Within this general picture what really marks a difference between the two age groups is the perception of proximity with the topic.

Adults have a higher degree of consciousness about the topic: more than half of sample (59%) showed the perception of infertility as a spreading issue. Youths, on their side, have a blurrier perception of the real dimensions of the topic and they perceive it as **something far away from their everyday experience**. Youth, when investigated with qualitative methods, show the idea of **infertility as an “easy-to-solve” medical issue**, they are not aware of the physical and psychological pain that people with fertility issues have to face.

About fertility preservation programs adults feel the urgency of **public preventive actions** (similar to those activated for the HIV). Most of the participants stressed how **schools and public health care system** should undertake a more effective action in that direction.

Participants suggested a motto: Today you are fine, tomorrow you don't know...

Conclusion

- Youths perceive as a **proper parental age a period of time far away from their everyday experience** (30 y.o.). This is largely **related to social issues** like: work availability, economic situation, etc.;
- Fertility issues are an hidden topic in mainstream media agenda;
- Youth have **no perception of the reality of medical treatment for fertility issues**: often there is the perception of something easily solved.
- Infertile couples suggest to **improve the sexual education program in school and to add infertility topic**.

References

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