

Infertility and Adoption: A Study of Infertile Women in Jammu City

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Abstract: Infertility is a subject of social concern to the family as well as to the community in the country. Not bearing a child within a couple of years of marriage produces a lot of questions from family as well as friends. Infertility has so many social consequences that a woman has to face in the society. Adoption as a solution to infertility gives a new hope to women who are unable to conceive. Based on fieldwork conducted regarding infertile women in Jammu city, this paper makes an attempt to give an insight of consequences faced by the infertile women in the family as well as in the society. The paper has also discussed various strategies to overcome infertility and adoption is one of the strategies which have given a chance to women to become mothers.

KEYWORDS: Infertility, Adoption, violence, Stigma, Inauspicious, Mother, Marriage, Children.

I. INTRODUCTION

Infertility and infecundity is usually defined as the failure of a sexually active couple who are not using contraceptives to have a baby within one year of marriage. This includes the term “sterility” but the diagnosis of infertility does not necessarily mean sterility. Qadeer (2010) in the work has said that Infertility could be of two types- primary and secondary. Primary infertility is infertility when a woman never conceives. Secondary infertility is the inability to have babies after one or more initial births. This is more common cause of infertility in the Third world.

Widge (2004) in her work has argued that the government policies in India have largely ignored the issue of infertility. The National Population Policy, 2000 mentions it only briefly in the context of providing information, counseling and regular supply of medication only for communities like tribals, displaced and migrant populations who ‘may not need fertility regulation’. There is also a limited focus on services for the infertile in the Reproductive and Child Health Programme. Though the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-07) has discussed access to essential clinical examination, investigation, management and counseling services for infertility, such services are in practice rarely available in the public sector. She has further argued that there is little evidence on the levels and patterns of infertility in India.

It is a social expectation that men and women marry and carry on the lineage of the family. This is very common that after marriage of a woman, people ask a woman’s name and then “How many children do you have?”. Women are often uneducated so their only identity comes from being mother. Our social and cultural institutions continue to emphasize the importance of motherhood for the female role. If being a mother is synonymous with being a woman, then failure to become a mother constitutes not fully achieving the status of ‘woman’. The failure not to conceive becomes the social problem. Infertility has been regarded as a great personal tragedy for women; involving much emotional pain and grief for women especially when it results from a failure to conceive. There is the negative impact of infertility more on women than men. Thus, being infertile make a woman to suffer a lot for her survival in the family and society.

Smyke (1991) has argued that fertility is the natural capacity to produce children and some women are biologically unable to perform this process. Childlessness or infertility is a great curse in many parts of the developing world but is found in all regions. A study by M.E. Khan et al. (2001) on perceived causes of infertility among rural couples of Gujarat found infertility considered to be a physical disability, which makes them incapable of conceiving and producing children. Fate and *karma* and consumption of hot food and the use of family planning methods were linked with infertility. Thus, ideas and notions of what causes infertility vary from one socio-cultural context to another.

Tabong et al (2013) in their work have studied the infertility in Ghana. Infertility is a global reproductive health issue that affects many individuals and couples. Despite the high prevalence of infertility in Ghana, no study has been done on the experiences of infertile couples in Ghana. The study therefore explored the experiences of infertile couples in Northern Ghana using the upper west region as a case study. Infertile couples are socially stigmatized and excluded from leadership roles in their communities. Couples without children are denied membership in the ancestral world thereby losing the opportunity to live again. Thus, Infertility is considered as one of the severe problems in the society. If a woman is not able to bear the child after marriage then she has to face excessive harsh comments from her in-laws and her husband which disrupt the on-going married life and give rise to the problems for such women. This situation proves curse for women and result in being ostracised by the society. The women who fail to conceive are not accepted easily by the society.

II. OBJECTIVES

The present research paper is based on the following objectives

- To study the consequences faced by infertile women
- To study various strategies to overcome infertility

III. METHODOLOGY

The universe for the present study has been Jammu city. For the present study the sample size taken was 50 infertile women. As it was difficult to ascertain the exact number of women who are infertile, therefore the snowball sampling has been used for the selection of the desired number of respondents for the present paper. For data collection both primary and secondary sources has been used. Secondary data was collected through using books, journals, articles, internet sources etc. Primary sources included the first hand information collected from the specific population groups during the fieldwork conducted. For primary data, field work was conducted in the area of study using interview method. The interview method of collecting data involves presentation of oral verbal stimuli and reply in terms of oral-verbal response. The method of collecting information through personal interviews was carried out in a structured way. The structured interview contained both the open and the closed ended questions.

IV. CONSEQUENCES OF INFERTILITY

- **Stigma:** The stigma of the infertile women is so immense that this condition of not being able to bear a child makes them socially isolated and neglected in family and society leading to the stigmatization for the infertile women. It was observed that infertile women consider themselves as incomplete and unlucky as they are stigmatized within the family as well as in the society because of the reason of not bearing a child. The childless women are also called as the 'banjh'. Men who cannot become a father are neither stigmatized the way women are.
- **Inauspicious:** The society also considers that infertile women have a power to curse. The barren women are capable of casting an evil eye/ perceived as bad omen. Joshi (2010) argues that infertile women are considered inauspicious, capable of bringing bad luck and are hence kept away from all happy celebrations like marriage or birth of a child. It was observed that infertile women were not allowed to attend any auspicious ceremony neither in their own family nor in their neighbourhood or relatives. Even they were not allowed to be the part of the baby shower of their relatives or friends because of the reason that they are already cursed of not being mother and it is perceived that an infertile woman can bring curse on the woman who has conceived.
- **Domestic Violence and marital disruption:** After marriage, every woman plans about their next generation and if it doesn't happen it results in several marriage problems. Child bearing is an important goal for couples after marriage and not being able to have children may cause marital disruption. Infertile women experience marital disruption which leads to domestic violence perpetrated by their husbands or in-laws.
- **Women held responsible for infertility:** It was seen that not only society holds women responsible but family also considers woman at fault if she is not able to get pregnant and this leads to the rise in violence and harassment against the woman in the family. Even women has to face excessive harsh comments from her in-laws and her husband which disrupt the on-going married life and give rise to the problems for infertile women.

V. STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME INFERTILITY

- **Visited Religious Places:** There are various religious places which are visited by infertile women so as to be blessed with a child. From the fieldwork it was evident that majority of respondents admitted that they went to various religious places in Jammu as well as outside the Jammu. In religious places these women perform different rituals so as to overcome their infertility. It was also observed that before going for medical treatment for their infertility majority of the women went to religious places. The respondents were of the view that going for medical treatment for infertility makes a woman stigmatized in the society.
- **Visited Saints (babas and sayanas):** From the fieldwork it was also observed that women tend to seek help from *babas* and *sayanas* so as to overcome their infertility. The most frequent methods used by them (*babas and sayanas*) are herbal treatments and they do prayers and other rituals like *mannat*. It can be concluded that in the desperation of having a child women try their best so that they could overcome their infertility as well as the stigmatized attached with them of being infertile.
- **Adoption:** Adoption is the act of establishing a person as a parent of one who is not in fact or in law his child. It signifies the means by which status or legal relationship of parent and child between persons who are not so related by nature is established or created. The very purpose is to create a new relationship. Adoption is also defined as a process by which people take a child who was not born to them and raise him/her as a member of their family. Thus, adoption serves the double purpose of giving a child a home and giving parents a child. It is a wonderful social institution, one that every civilized society supports. And yet, in India, there is frequently a shroud of secrecy around adoption.

Adoption is not a new concept. If women are not able to bear a child they are going for adoption. Women have adopted child from their own family like they have adopted child from their sister-in-law, bother-in-law or from their own brother and sister. Adoption is not a cure for infertility but yes it has given opportunity to many women to enjoy motherhood. Sen (2008) has argued that the adoption is founded upon the Brahmanical doctrine of adoption which states that every Hindu owes a duty to his ancestors to provide for and preserve the continuance of the line and the solemnization of the necessary rites. The advent of modern times brought a radical change in the concept and aim of adoption. Nowadays adoption is also taken to be a means to provide consolation and relief to

destitute or the orphan child. In shastric law begetting a son was the sole aim but under the Act, even a daughter can be taken in adoption keeping in view the provisions of the law that is in absence of a female child.

Bhargava (2005) has argued that adoption as a solution to childlessness occurs only after a long period of deliberation. Sometimes, the couples horoscope is examined by the family astrologer to see whether the celestial configuration has allowed them the privilege of parenthood. Adoption may not be restored to if it is found that they do not have *santan sukh* (the joy and privilege of child-rearing) in their horoscopes. Even when parents are aware of adoption as an alternative, the process of arriving at a decision is not an easy one. In most cases, the extended family, that may or may not be living with the couple, plays a significant role in decision-making. Involuntary childlessness can lead to adoption. The couples in the hope of having the biological child tend to wait longer. When it becomes clear that it is not possible to have a child of their own, couples decide to adopt a child.

From the fieldwork it was observed that majority of the women respondents were in the favour of adopting a child so that an infertile woman can also enjoy the blessing of motherhood. It was also evident that women do not prefer to adopt a child from an orphanage and prefer to adopt from any of the relatives or friends.

VI. CASE STUDIES

In this section, various case studies of infertile women has been taken into consideration to have an insight of problems faced by women during adoption of a child.

Case- 1: Sanchi (name changed) after two years of her marriage, conceived for the first time, but unfortunately, miscarriage happen. After that, she was not able to conceive. She also went for treatment and she got all her tests done and her reports were normal. She faced lot of problems from her in-laws especially from her mother-in-law. These series of events led her to grave depression and slowly she started isolating herself and her in-laws refused to provide her medical treatment. Looking at the extent of cruelty his sister was facing, her elder brother filed a divorce case in the court and after seven years of her marriage, she got the divorce from the court. Currently, she is working as a manager in a private bank and earning a handsome salary. Now she is living with her parents and has adopted the younger son of her brother. She is very happy with her son and enjoying a good life with him.

Case- 2: Radha (name changed), even after three years of marriage, was not able to bear a child. Her in-laws supported her mentally and emotionally and didn't subject her to any form of torture. Her mother-in-law on her behalf visited numerous shrines and temples that her son be blessed with a child. Most of the time she used to pray for her son and daughter-in-law. And her prayers bore fruit when Radha's sister-in-law (jethani) Anu (Name changed) was blessed with a baby girl. Radha's mother-in-law advised anu to give her daughter to Radha for adoption as she already had two sons. Initially, Anu was reluctant to give her daughter to Radha but observing the pain and mental anguish of not having a child that Radha was going through, anu finally agreed to give her daughter to Radha.

Case- 3: Tripta Devi (name changed), after five years of her marriage, conceived for the first time. But she miscarried. After that she waited for many years but was unable to conceive. She also asked her husband to go for a second marriage to have a child. Her husband was supportive. But her mother-in-law used to pressurize her to bear a child. She has also heard that people also call her Banjh (infertile) when she is not around. Now she has adopted daughter of her brother-in-law, happy with her.

Case- 4: Mitali (name changed) was not able to give birth to the child even after 10 years of her marriage. She conceived three times but experienced miscarriage all the three times. Her in-laws were not supportive as she was not able to continue their lineage. Her in-laws never physically abused her but always pointed fingers at her for not being able to bear a child. Mitali's elder sister took the responsibility of bearing the child for her, even her (Mitali's elder sister) own children were of 15 years age. Her sister gave birth to a girl child and Mitali got a daughter after legal adoption. After 4 years her brother was blessed with twin boys. He also gave one of the sons to Mitali.

Case- 5: Anisha (name changed) was unable to conceive up to 5 years. She told that she went into depression due to her own thoughts. Her mother in law, though an uneducated lady, never talked wrong for her infertility. Anisha put in all efforts for bearing a child. She undertook medical treatment, all ritual restrictions, etc. But all the efforts were in vain, her husband took her to Bangalore for fertility check. But the reports came as a shock that she medically was not capable to bear a child ever in her life. When the whole family was in grief, she told nobody blamed her for this. Then her sister-in-law (husband's sister) offered that she wants to bear a child for her brother and bhabhi. All the family members appreciated her decision and accepted that irrespective of the gender of the child she'll give the baby to her brother. Her sister-in-law (husband's sister) gave birth to a baby boy that Anisha and her husband adopted legally.

VII. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded as becoming mother has been considered very important for women in Indian culture. The infertility of a woman can bring severe consequences for women in the family as well as in the society. Women can be tagged as 'barren'. This tag makes women vulnerable and stigmatized within the society. It was also seen that most of the women followed religious activities as well as medical treatment for conception and to overcome infertility. These religious rituals could be easily performed and were cost effective. A little change has been observed during the fieldwork where infertile women got support from husband and in-laws. But not much change has been observed regarding the perception of society towards the infertile women. From the case studies it was

analyzed that not much support was observed from the family members regarding the adoption of a child. The problem of infertility is of great concern and women in the society should not be judged on the basis of their inability to procreate. Thus, there is the need of social acceptance of infertile woman which may bring a change in the stigmatization of infertile women in the society.

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