

Infertility: An Emerging Issue in Nepal

by

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Abstract

Having children is one of the versatile dreams of every married couple. Most of these couples are lucky enough having children but some of them are not due to infertility problem. Infertility refers to an inability to conceive after having regular unprotected intercourse. It is a major component of the reproductive health and one of the neglected issues in Nepal. Largest surveys like Nepal Demographic and Health Survey also have not collected the information regarding infertility. In this paper an attempt has been made to present an overall insight about infertility in Nepal using secondary source collected from journals and articles found on the internet. About 8 to 12 percent of couples around the world are affected by infertility and one in every four couples in developing countries has been found to be affected by infertility. About 1 out of every 10 couples has difficulty conceiving a child. About 13-15 percent of the married couples face this problem in Nepal. At least six new cases of infertility are registered per day at the renowned infertility center. Infertility is emerging case due to changing life style of people in Nepal.

Keywords: Infertility, Reproductive Health, Marriage, Sexual Intercourse

Introduction:

Infertility is one of the neglected reproductive health issues around the world. Governments, INGOs and NGOs mostly focus on managing unwanted births but very low attention has been paid in the area of infertility. This problem was also able to draw the attention of government leaders and reproductive health experts in ICPD, 1994. This conference recommended all members countries to include infertility as part of their reproductive health care program (Shrestha, 2008). Infertility is one major component of integrated reproductive health package and thus is an important indicator of the nation's overall health status.

Infertility refers to an inability to conceive after having regular unprotected intercourse. Infertility can also refer to the biological inability of an individual to contribute to conception, or to a female who cannot carry a pregnancy to full term. In many countries, infertility refers to a couple that has failed to conceive after 12 months of regular intercourse without the use of contraception. The World Health Organization defines infertility as a disease of the reproductive

system defined by the failure to achieve a clinical pregnancy after 12 months or more of regular unprotected sexual intercourse (and there is no other reason, such as breastfeeding or postpartum amenorrhea). Primary infertility is infertility in a couple who have never had a child. Secondary infertility is failure to conceive following a previous pregnancy. Infertility may be caused by infection in the man or woman, but often there is no obvious underlying cause (WHO,2013).

Infertility is one of the neglected public health problems around the world. In recent world, about 10-15 percent married couples are childless. It is estimated that the number of infertile couple between 8 to 12 percent. One out of every ten couples; roughly 60 to 80 million men and women globally have difficulty to conceive, and one in every four couples in developing countries had been found to be affected by infertility (WHO, 2012).

Many Nepalese girls get married soon after the puberty. Nearly, 29 percent of currently married women are married before the legal age of 18 (NDHS, 2011). Soon after marriage a women is expected to have a child. In Nepalese society, child bearing is the central issue in defining the women's identity, affirming her worth and establishing her position in the household and husband's kin group.

In Nepalese society, women are known as the image of patience, they can bear everything their husbands do even if that does not respect her. But it is said that a woman cannot bear if her husband marries another wife due to inability to conceive a child. Nepalese women have limited access to resources, due to the existing social structure, strong patriarchal norms and practices, few opportunities and mobility constraints due to which they cannot take necessary decisions regarding the infertility treatment. Eventually this leads to psychological impact leading to isolation from the family. Although women's infertility is of greater research consideration, in Nepal, infertility rate is about 13 -15 percent (Srivastav, 2012). It is experienced that about 40 percent of these couples have male factor infertility.

Causes of Infertility:

Studies indicate that slightly over half of all cases of infertility are results of female conditions, while the rest are caused by either sperm disorders or unidentified factors. According to The Mayo Clinic, USA: about 20 percent of cases of infertility are due to the problem in the man like low sperm count or quality, problems with the tubes carrying sperm, problems getting an erection and problems of ejaculating. Similarly, about 40 percent to 50 percent of cases of infertility are due to a problem in the woman like, damage to the fallopian tubes, ovulatory problems, endometriosis, conditions affecting the uterus, a combination of factors etc. and about 30 to 40 percent of cases of infertility are due to problems in both the man and the woman.

Although, overall studies found that female causes accounted for between 25 to 37 percent infertility worldwide (with large number in south Asia and sub Africa), male causes accounted for between 8 to 22 percent and both male and female causes accounted for between 21 to 38 percent.

Despite of this fact women are often solely blamed for infertility (Shrestha, 2008). Similarly, excessive consumption of tobacco and alcohol, sexually transmitted diseases and abnormal hormones pose high risk of infertility for both males and females in Nepal (Subedi, 2011), 40 percent female factor & remaining 10 percent are those in whom no diagnosis can be made even after complete investigation. Late marriage, obesity, induced abortion in the first pregnancy and inactive lifestyle are the main reasons behind infertility among women in urban areas (Shrivastava, 2012).

Methods:

The aim of this paper is to review the available literature regarding the situation of infertility in the context of Nepal. The literature search focused on the findings of the studies published on national and international journals. The method adopted for review was literature from WHO, Pub Med and most relevant and recent articles found on internet.

Discussion:

Infertility is a rising case in Nepal. It prevails in the rural as well as in the urban areas. The lack of proper health services, least awareness of reproductive health, no access to timely treatment and consultation has worsened the problem. In traditional society like Nepalese society, infertility poses a huge problem for a happily married couple for not being able to conceive the baby resulting to various social and psychological problems on women such as polygamy, domestic violence etc.

There are not adequate studies/ researches about prevalence and consequences of infertility in Nepal. Biggest study on demographic and health survey of Nepal also does not cover any data about the infertility. However, government of Nepal has shown some indication of importance in reproductive health after ICPD, 1994.

There are not reliable and current data on the study of infertility in Nepal. A study regarding status of reproductive health morbidities in Nepal conducted by UNFPA in eight district of Nepal found 7.5 percent of female reported having infertility problem among them and among the women who were reported infertility, 40 percent have tried one or other form of traditional remedies for infertility. Most practiced traditional remedies included herbs/special food, dhams/jhankri and special puja (UNFPA,2006).

Although there has not been reliable national survey available about the infertility rate in Nepal. However it is expected that about 13-15 percent of the married couples face this problem. At least six new cases of infertility are registered per day at the renowned infertility center which as compared to just one case a day or less only five years ago (Shrivastava, 2012).

Social Consequences of Infertility:

Most of the couples when faced with the crisis of infertility go through a chain of emotional changes. These emotional changes can be harmful to the couple. Depression is a common reaction to this problem. It is the response to the excessive losses and prolonged stress created by the infertility process. Infertile couples may have feelings of failure, loss, disappointment, and betrayal. Couples face a terrible shock when the cause of male or female factor of infertility is identified. Especially women may develop feelings of hopelessness, anger, shame, and guilt in facing their partners as well as their parents and relatives (Guerra et al., 1998). Infertility causes harass poignant and unique difficulties, economic hardship social stigma and blame, social isolation, guilt, fear, loss of social status, helplessness and in some cases violence.

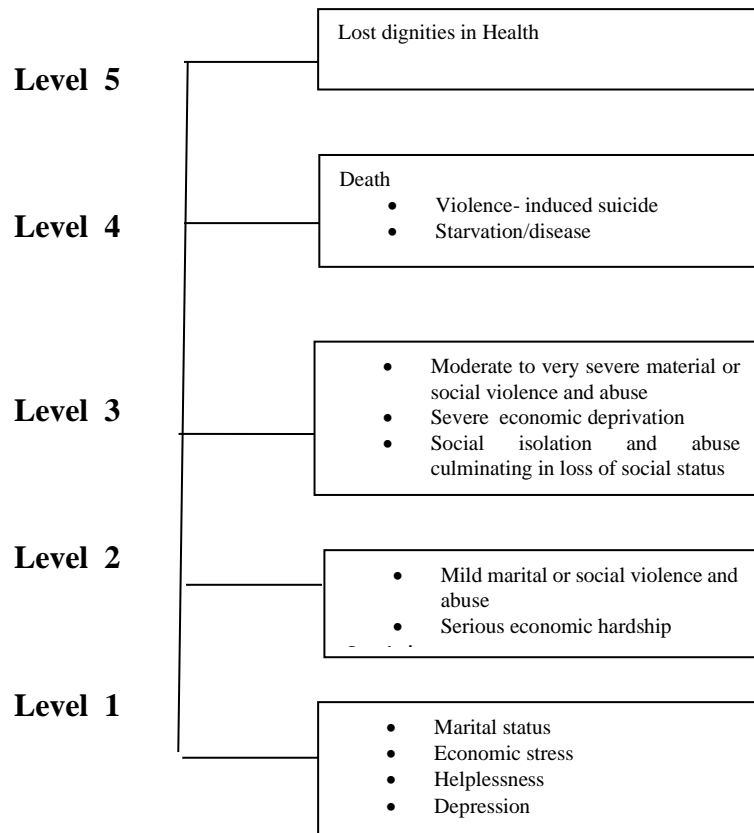


Fig 1 Continuum of the consequences of infertility (Shrestha 2008)

Conclusion:

Generally, it seems the problem of infertility has given less attention by concerned authorities. Socially it is not regarded as a life-threatening problem. Personally, who is victim of Infertility problem, it is a life crisis with invisible losses, and its consequences are manifold. Infertility affects a large number of couples at many dimensions in their reproductive life. Globally, an average 8 to 12 percent of couples are affecting a problem of infertility.

Infertility is a rising issue in Nepal. It rises in both in the cities and villages. Late marriage, obesity, induced abortion in the first pregnancy and inactive lifestyle are the main reasons behind infertility among women in urban areas. The ICPD, 1994 also recommended all members of countries to include infertility as part of their reproductive health care program. The National Reproductive Health Strategy 1998 has accepted prevention and management of infertility as one of the component of integrated reproductive health package. There has not been reliable national survey available about the infertility rate in Nepal. However, it is expected that about 13 to 15 percent of the married couples are affected by infertility problem. Infertility problem is one of the greater reproductive health concerns at national level. Extensive research on different aspects of infertility is necessary to fulfill the gap of relevant data and to minimize the social and psychological problems of the couples with infertility.

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