

Stigma and infertility

Presentation by Jan Goossens, director of The Walking Egg.

Key messages:

- World wide estimate assume that 8-12 % of couples experience some form of infertility during their reproductive lives (WHO 1991); some 60-80 million couples are affected (WHO 1997).
- Consequences for wellbeing can be very severe, including social isolation, repudiation, punishment and suicide.
- Considerable differences among countries and in countries. In various African countries ('the infertility belt') prevalence is as high as 20-30% (Ericksen & Brunette 1996).
- Fertility treatment is not accessible for many people, in low-income countries there are only few fertility centres.
- Also the consequences are not the same in high-income countries (mainly fear, guilt, stress, depression...) as in low-income countries (rather lost dignity, severe economic deprivation, violence, starvation...).
- Infertility treatment is a reproductive right, but receives little attention and little resources.
- Recommendations include:
 - De-stigmatize infertile women and men
 - Enable adoption and fostering
 - Empowerment / enhancing gender roles
 - Increasing services to prevent and treat STDs, obstetric care and safe abortions
 - Sensitizing the public about factors that affect fertility
 - Improving diagnosis and – low tech - treatment of infertility
 - Introducing high tech diagnosis and treatment where feasible and affordable
- The Walking Egg lab: simplified method, but efficient and of high quality, currently being implemented in several low-income countries.