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Sharing infertility: are treatments taboo?

From Lisa Sidgwick on July 8, 2014



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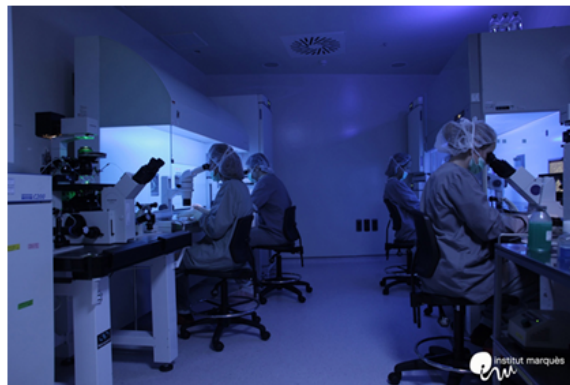
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A little over 14 years ago I had IVF treatment. It's no secret; it's something my friends and family know about, the resulting 13 year old twins have always known and for anyone who's a babyworld regular it's there in black and white on my profile page. Far from being ashamed or embarrassed about it, I see the experience as a gift, the very thing that made it possible for me to become a mum. However, whilst we were having the treatment, only my parents knew.

I'm not sure how I'd have felt if the treatment hadn't worked, and it wasn't until I was 12 weeks



pregnant that we felt confident enough to share what we'd been through. As infertility treatment becomes more and more mainstream, even commonplace in the UK it's not something that we Brits tend to hide, yet in other countries that's not the case...

According to the findings of a new study 'Is infertility a taboo subject?' conducted by Institut Marques., infertility is viewed very differently across Europe. The majority of Italians, Irish and German patients feel that the subject of fertility treatment is a taboo whereas only 36% of British patients and 35% of Spanish patients feel that way.

Sharing infertility – minimal information, and only in the closest circles

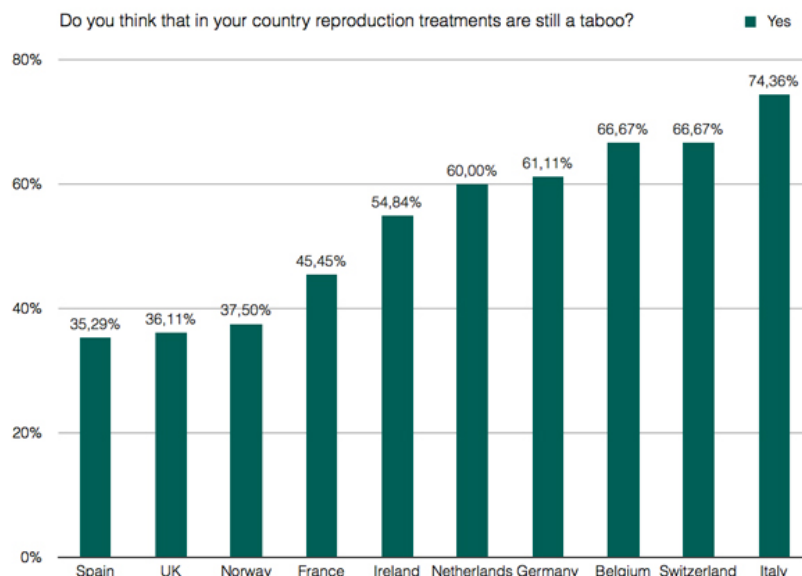
According to the study, 8 out of 10 British couples had explained to those closest to them that they were having treatment: 16% had spoken with family members, close friends and work colleagues, 40% just with family and friends, and 44% only with their family.

Sharing the information made them feel better, provided it was shared only with close friends and family; few (16%) British patients discussed their experience in online forums and social networks. If requested to tell their story in public, only half of British patients would be willing to do so, and only providing the details of the treatment itself were not given.

Dr Walker, fertility specialist at Institut Marquès, said: "Some patients are wary of discussing their infertility with others because they worry that this could affect people's attitudes towards their child in the future.

"Furthermore, if couples conceive using sperm or egg donation, they may decide not to tell their child, so the less people that know, the less likely it is that the child will find out. We advise couples to tell people they are having treatment, but not to give details, simply requesting support, discretion and respect, without judgement or unhelpful comments".

Differences between countries



The social context of infertility is possibly linked to cultural and religious traditions in each country, and is also affected by the legislative framework that is in place. A great variety of legislation exists in Europe: in Germany and Norway, for example, egg donation and embryo donation are both illegal techniques, and therefore couples undergoing these particular treatments need to live with a degree of secrecy.

The study analysed opinions of 952 patients from 10 countries. The patients were given a questionnaire on the day of their embryo transfer, and were asked about the extent to which they discuss their fertility with friends and family in their own country.

The study showed that, regardless of laws, cultures and religion in their home countries, couples suffering from infertility all have a common need: to share their problem with their close family. However, patients tend not to go into detail with their family about the type of treatment they are receiving.



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Photo Credit: Institut Marques

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