

## **Consciousness of Women Regarding Primary Infertility: An Indian Study**

**Background:** Motherhood is so deeply rooted with the identity of women in India; couples are expected to procreate within the first year of marriage, and there is enormous pressure on them, particularly women, to prove their fertility within the first year of marriage. A failure to conceive within months of marriage immediately leads to concerns and anxiety about infertility because childbearing is considered an essential role in life. With the moving wheel of time there has been a lot of changes in society and so in the attitude of women regarding their own fertility problems.

**Objectives:** This paper attempts to study the differentials in the pace of realization of problem of primary infertility through successive marriage cohorts i.e., from 1970-79 to 2000-06 and its determinants among currently married women aged 15-49 years.

**Data and Methods:** Study sample includes 38,783 currently married women from the third round of the District Level Household and Facility Survey, India (2007-08). Cox proportional hazard model was used for assessing the association of pace of infertility with selected background characteristics among women of different marriage cohorts (1970-79 to 2000-06) aged 15-49 years. Women who married after the year 2006 were not included in the present study, owing to short span between the marriage and survey.

**Results:** It was found that among infertile women in marriage cohort 1970-79 around 60 percent of them realized the problem in the first conception in more than three years since the consummation of marriage whereas among infertile women in marriage cohort 1980-89 more nearly 54 percent women realized the problem of primary infertility within 0-2 years since the age at consummation of marriage (Table 1). Furthermore, 59 percent infertile women in marriage cohort 1990-99 realized the problem within 0-2 years since the consummation of marriage. Among infertile women in marriage cohort 2000-06, as much as three-fourth realized the problem within 0-2 years since the consummation of marriage. The mean duration since consummation of marriage after which women realized the problem of infertility has declined by 1.5 years from marriage cohort 1970-79 to 2000-06. Results from hazard ratio analyses (Table 2) indicate that as compared to adolescent women pace of realization of primary infertility is 20-23 percent less among women aged 20-49 years, however, the pace of realization of primary infertility is 6 percent higher among those women who were above age 20 at the time of consummation of marriage. The pace of realization of primary infertility increases by 10-48 percent through the successive marriage cohort. As

compared to rural women pace of realization of primary infertility was found to be 5 percent less among urban women.

**Conclusion:** As we move through successive marriage cohort more and more percentage of women realize problem of primary infertility within 0-2 years since consummation of marriage. There has been a decline in the mean duration since the consummation of marriage after which infertile women realized the problem of primary infertility. The pace of realization of problem of primary infertility is decreases with increasing age, and urban residence, however, the pace increased with age at consummation of marriage, through successive marriage cohort, with increasing wealth status. Though, the International Conference on Population and Development (1994) states that reproductive health services should include the prevention and appropriate treatment of infertility, but there is inadequate focus on infertility in India's reproductive health program. Policies should be strengthened to incorporate infertility as a major public health issue and there is a long way to go starting from meeting the unmet need of infertile couples to protection of infertile women from any kind of fraudulent in the name of treatment.

**Table 1. Percentage of currently married women aged 15-49 years, by duration since consummation of marriage realized the problem of primary infertility, according to age at consummation of marriage in different marriage cohort (1970-79 to 2000-06) in India.**

Age at consummation of marriage	Years since consummation of marriage realized problem of primary infertility							
	1970-79		1980-89		1990-99		2000-06	
	0-2	3+	0-2	3+	0-2	3+	0-2	3+
<20	42.8	57.2	51.6	48.4	56.0	44.0	73.6	26.4
20-24	62.5	37.5	65.3	34.7	67.8	32.2	80.7	19.3
>25	NA	NA	62.3	37.7	69.2	30.8	84.3	15.7
Total	43.1	56.9	53.6	46.4	59.2	40.8	76.5	23.5
Mean duration (years)	3.53		3.06		2.79		1.98	

Note: NA- Not Available

**Table 2. Hazard ratios from Cox regression analyses assessing the association of pace of realization of primary infertility and selected background characteristics among currently married primarily infertile women aged 15-49 years, India.**

<b>Background characteristics</b>	<b>Exp (<math>\beta</math>)</b>
<b>Current age</b>	
15-19 <sup>®</sup>	
20-29	0.783***
30-39	0.774***
40-49	0.791***
<b>Age at consummation of marriage</b>	
<20 <sup>®</sup>	
20-24	1.060***
$\geq$ 25	1.058**
<b>Marriage cohort</b>	
1970-1979 <sup>®</sup>	
1980-1989	1.100***
1990-1999	1.145***
2000-2006	1.478***
<b>Place of residence</b>	
Rural <sup>®</sup>	
Urban	0.954***
<b>Caste</b>	
SC <sup>®</sup>	
ST	1.032
OBC	0.972**
Others	0.956***
<b>Wealth quintiles</b>	
Poor <sup>®</sup>	
Middle	1.027**
Rich	1.111***

<sup>®</sup> represents reference category, \* Significance at level of 10%, \*\* significance at level of 5% and \*\*\* significance at level of 1%.