

ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY (ART) METHODS IN ESTABLISHING ALTERNATIVE FAMILY FORMS: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Shubhankar Sarma

Faculty, Sociology department

St. Edmund's College, Shillong-Meghalaya, India



OBJECTIVES

- To understand the different methods of Assisted Reproductive Technology is establishing alternative family forms.
- To learn about the growing concern on lineage and kinship ties achieved through ART methods.
- To explore the socio-cultural and moral norms that are said to be challenged due to the undertaking of ART practices.
- To analyze the growing alternative forms of parenthood in contemporary times.
- To find out how women's sexuality and gender identity revolves around her fertility and childbearing capabilities.
- To have an idea on the financial or economic limitations that act as a hindrance towards achieving the ART goals.

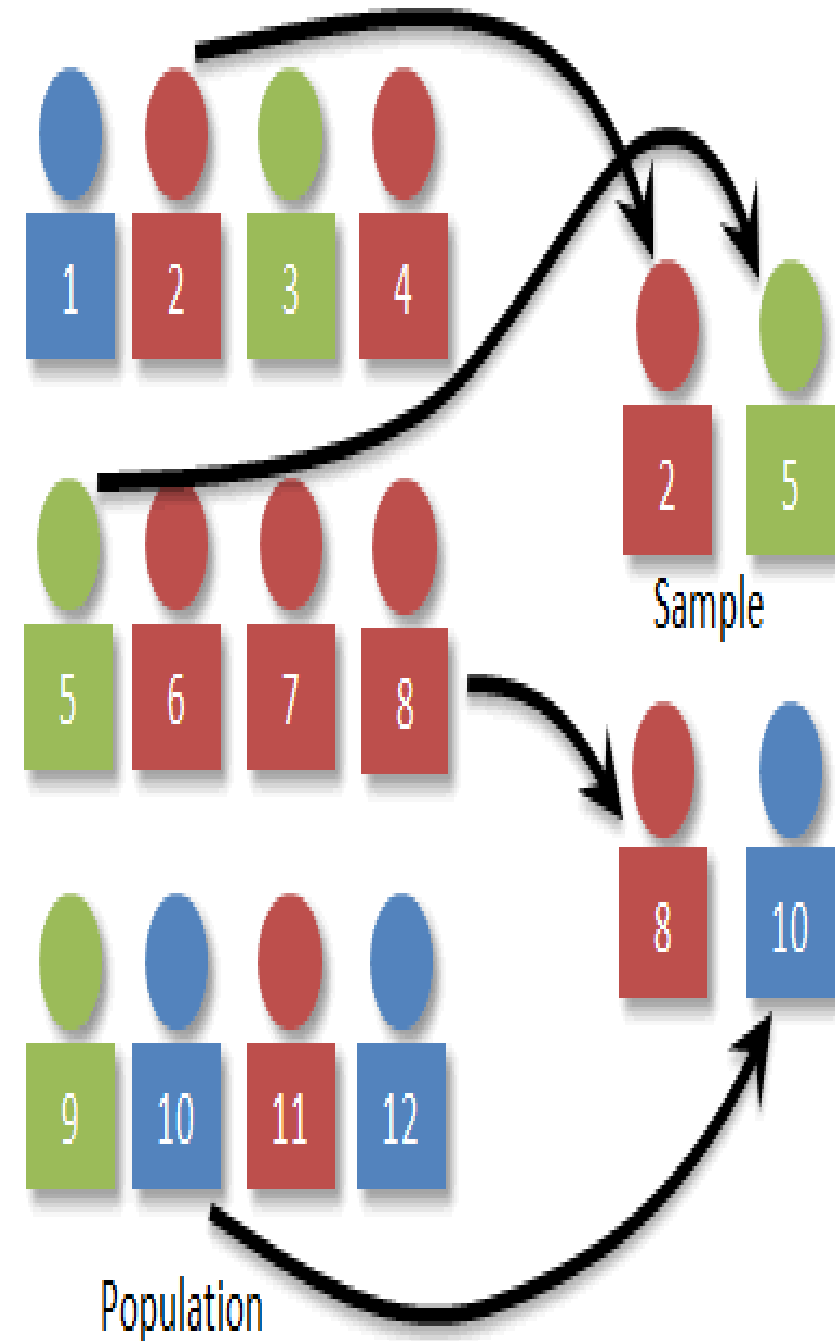


INTRODUCTION

- For a society and human race to continue its existence there certainly is the need for kinship agents who can continue the lineage and to do so is one of the primary agenda behind human reproduction and childbirth. However, in cases of reproductive constraints or infertility where biological or natural pregnancy does not get implanted, couples need to look for alternative mechanisms to realize their pregnancy and childbirth.
- However, in cases of reproductive constraints or infertility where biological or natural pregnancy does not get implanted, couples need to look for alternative mechanisms to realize their pregnancy and childbirth
- The ART methods have presented an alternative image whereby partners involved in the entire gestation cycle has delimited its number of parents from two to close to ten numerically. These different typologies of ‘mothers’ and ‘fathers’ or largely as ‘parents’ include, genetic mother, carrying mother, nurturing mother, complete mother, genetic and carrying mother, genetic and nurturing mother, carrying and nurturing mother, genetic father, nurturing father, and complete father respectively.
- The various ART methods, though promote conception and induces pregnancy, come with several social, legal and moral implications. The primary element around which most debates and discussions revolve is its question on the purity of actual kinship ties and if adopting such a mechanism is a threat to the protection of family and ancestral lineage, and practice of cultural incest, if any.

METHODOLOGY

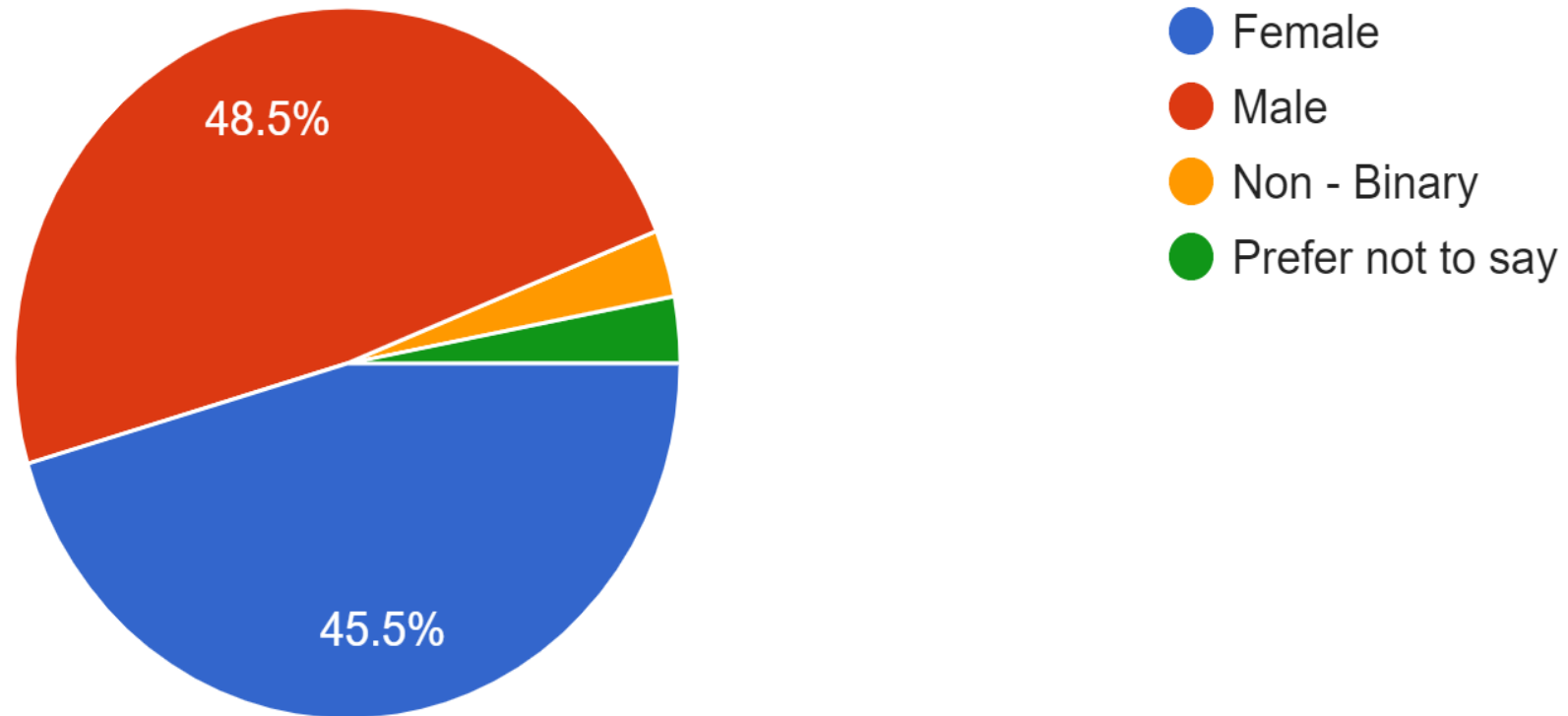
- The research for this paper is based on **qualitative** data.
- The study has been conducted with the use of **questionnaires** through the survey method as well as virtual and face to face **interviews** were held too.
- The **sampling method** used in this research is “**non-probability**” sampling. Narrowing it down further, in this research “purposive sampling” and “snowball sampling” have been used.
- The research being conducted had a **sample size of 33** in total only due to limited timeframe and other logistical arrangements.



Sample

Gender

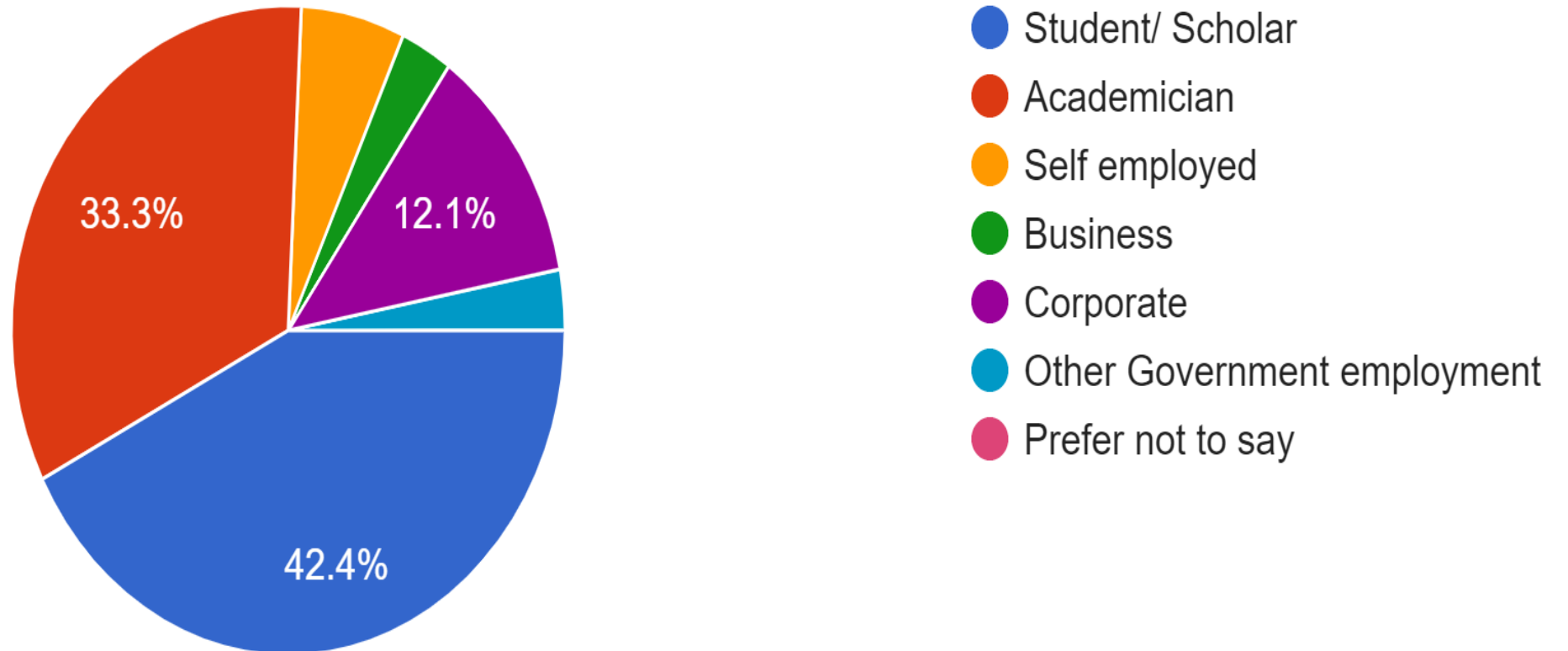
33 responses



Sample

Occupation

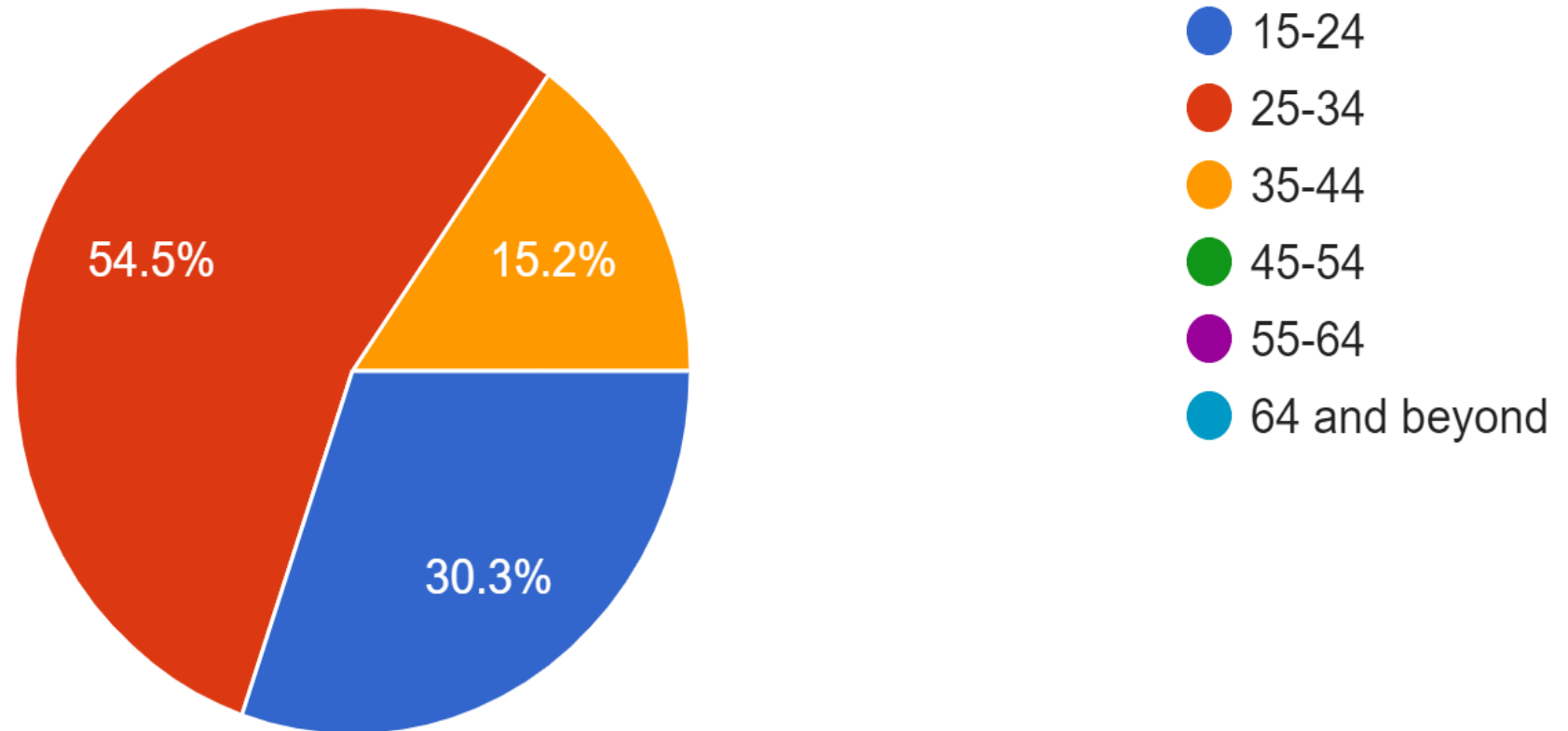
33 responses



Sample

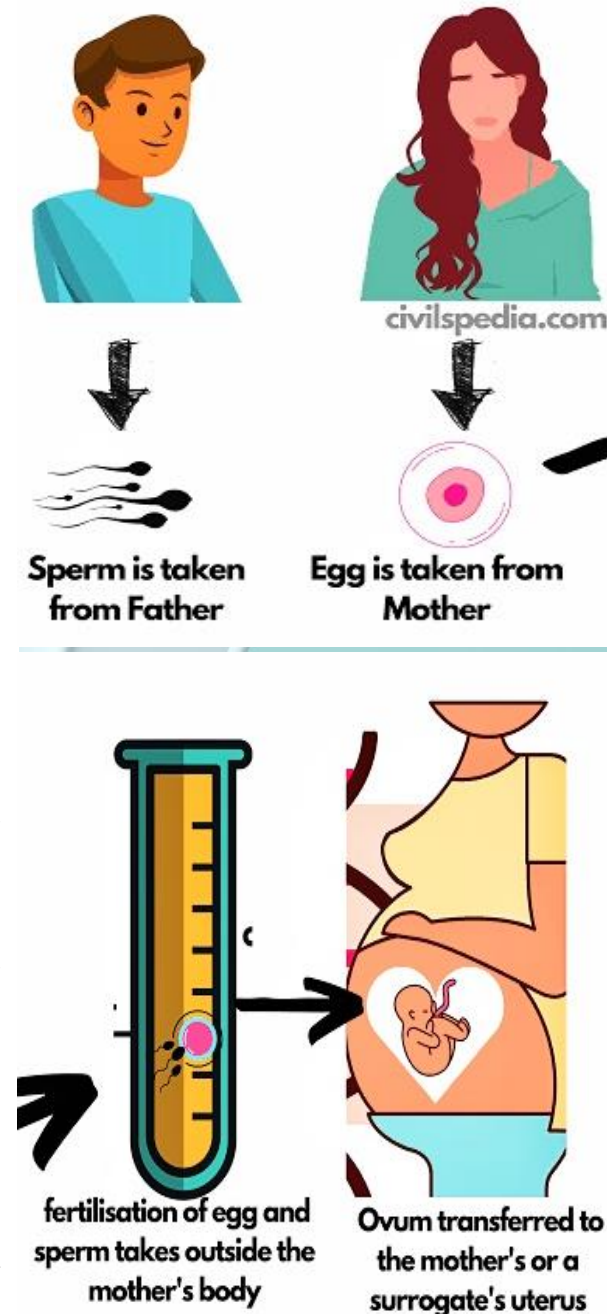
Age

33 responses



Findings and discussions

- Women have been largely considered sexually important due to their natural ability to conceive future generations. The respondents were asked what their opinion on reported cases of female infertility are living in a patriarchal society where a woman's body, sexuality and gender identity is brought into suspicion and scrutiny due to her inability to conceive and towards biological childbirth. Majority of the respondents stated that women face the brunt of such processes and are expected to give birth because of a supposed 'natural' function of their body, which ultimately makes no sense and contributes to their bodily limitation
- While being asked to the respondents to see their opinion if the ART method(s) does or does not disrupt the lineage and morality of the child who is born using ART method(s) came with a mixed set of opinions. The respondents said that in most cases of ART method(s), genes from at least one parent are infused in the child's birth and that the parents only had to take the help of a technologically oriented reproduction tool to have a baby.
- The respondents showed concern on the development of a healthy fetus and birth of a healthy baby which is more important and that ironically it is morally inappropriate to discourage couples or individual who seek to be benefited by the services of ART mechanism.
- On the other hand, a section (relatively less) of the respondents about the question at hand opined that the use of ART methods disrupts consanguineous lineage but does not necessarily disrupt the morality of the family



Continued...

- Investigate if children born using ART method(s) and those born biologically are same or different in any kind, all the respondents greatly opined that child born either way are the same. In their view, a child is considered a child because of her/his/their age and not for the process involved through which they came to this world.
- A section of the respondents believed that more importance be given to the health aspect of the baby born in either form. It is true that babies born using ART method(s) have certain complications and such aspects need to be addressed more.
- The morality of the child involved in the ART case is something that has its relation to the cultural and moral lessons of life, how a child is socialized post birth within and outside of the family. There have been responses recorded where the respondent feel that lineage is an outdated, patriarchal construct and holds not much personal importance. Respondents opined that the use of ART methods disrupts consanguineous lineage but does not necessarily disrupt the morality of the family.

Continued...

- Lineage can be a subject of challenge and non-conformity for those children born using ART method(s) adopted due to male infertility. A host of the responses said that lineage in such cases can be adopted as per one's own will stating that let lineage be more a matter of personal preference and freedom. The question that ponders deeply for analysis is that if the biological father will want to accept the child or otherwise.
- The respondents on being asked about their opinion is whether families should be confined to stereotypical heterosexual relationships, there were a mixed set of opinions derived. There is a call for a more liberal than a narrow-minded society. The respondents were also of the view that a family not only talks about biological reproductive family but also the concept of chosen family.
- Heteronormativity and patriarchal mindset marginalize the non-binary community more and make their struggle even harder in this regard. In some of their view they believed that a man is a father, and a woman is a mother and not otherwise and that the biological facts of both cannot be denied. They opined that families based on heterosexual relationships tend to be more stable than those based on homosexual relationships.



Continued...

- On being questioned to the respondents about their opinion if ART based parenthood be considered same or different from biological parenthood, majority of the respondents opined that parenthood achieved either way is the same. Parenthood is more about being able to give adequate love and support to the child and to the family at large rather than focusing on its mode of attainment.
- Women's infertility often leads to stigmatization and marginalization of women among the in-laws especially as well as by mainstream society. The prejudice is entirely socially generated and therefore almost all the respondents see such aspects as shameful and call for urgent change of social perceptions and understanding on women's body and sexuality and the dominant gaze attached altogether.
- Male infertility, however, has been observed to be kept as a latent reality especially in a patriarchal social order. there is a stigma being attached to manhood or the male body, a kind of semen anxiety is created i.e. loss of manhood and therefore the women is being blamed for its inefficiency as they hold the submissive position in the society.



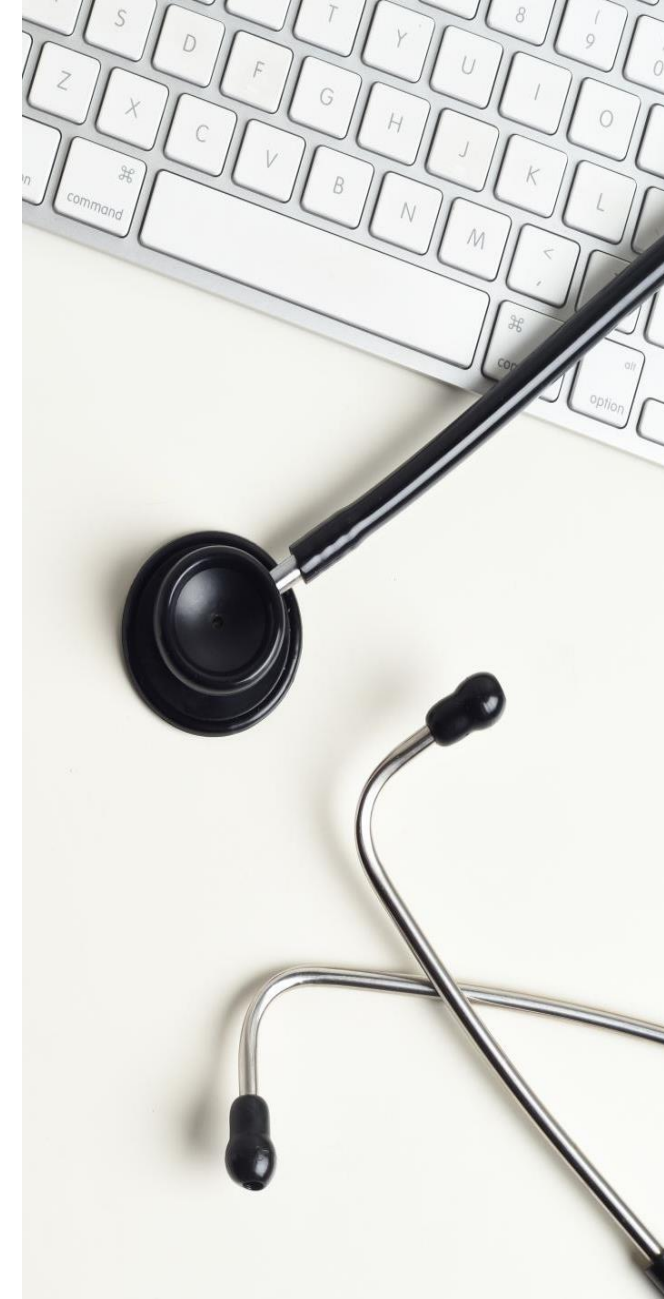
Continued...

- To know the opinion of the respondents on this aspect, respondents were asked if they think it is the right way to portray the importance and need of different ways of modern-day reproduction through movies and series. Most of the respondents feel that although depictions of ART in popular culture might not always be scientifically or sociologically correct, they do play a significant role in creating cultural awareness.
- A few others have opined that most of the movies on this theme that they have watched have been lighthearted and comedic. They think that the narratives require significant modifications and rearrangements in a society so steeped in regressive modes of thought.
- Economic instability acts as a major hindrance in achieving ART. Majority of the respondents believed that. Having less budget restricts them from celebrating parenthood.
- Response was also received on lines which stated that not all ART methods create an economic disability as artificial insemination could cost less than test tube babies or other costlier processes of ART. What needs to be focused is the governmental address by bringing it under their medical schemes and policies and availability of the services in public medical spaces.
- On being questioned to the respondents on this aspect, there was a mixed set of responses received. A section of the respondents feels that there is a lack of adequate regulation on the fertility clinics and ART banks and that it needs to be regulated with utmost priority. Lack of regulation as well as control over the procedures can very often lead to medical malpractice and can pose a threat to the health of the parents and the child and raise severe ethical concerns



Conclusion and the way forward...

- Despite the desire to take up the ART treatment, most couples or individuals are unable to due to the treatment being not cost effective. Here is where a government or non-government intervention plays a greater responsibility in ensuring cost effectiveness and greater accessibility by all sections and classes of people.
- Surrogate mothers for the lust of financial aid and support in heavy sums by the aspiring parents tend to carry a baby irresponsibly and without adequate legal support and such things need to be stopped. Organizations and activist groups working of family, procreation, gender and sexuality need to work on mass mobilization on the support system that the ART treatment enabled for sexual infertility and childlessness and a greater inclusive acceptance at the larger social level.
- Legal support through existing ART guidelines and the act need to be strongly enforced to ensure healthy living and family life of all concerned.



Thank You!