

Perspective Article

Is Reproduction a Fundamental Right? A Clinical, Ethical and Personal Perspective

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Life appeared on planet earth millions of years ago, probably by accident. Since time immemorial there has been a compelling biological urge and necessity to procreate, in order to sustain one's species and to continue the existence of life in the planet.¹

In the species, 'Homo sapiens', - who have been claimed as the highest order of evolution, reproduction has assumed very great significance. Humanity started regulating the reproduction of its and other species. This biological process continues to be manipulated to suit humanity's convenience and comfort. While tremendous changes are happening on a day to day basis, attention is focused mainly on controlling procreation of the species by family planning or fertility control. Fertility and infertility are two sides of the same coin. Many scientific breakthroughs in fertility control are related to infertility research programmes. Many fertility-enhancing drugs like clomiphene were discovered while researching for fertility control.²

Health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental, spiritual and social well being and not merely the absence of a disease or infirmity (WHO).³ Infertility affects the physical, mental, spiritual and social well being of the couple. The emotional impact and the social stigma relating to infertility are often forgotten and do not get the attention it deserves from the authorities.⁴

Reproduction is the most fundamental of all functions of a living being. All other functions of the life are subservient to this vital function. All life grows, attains reproductive maturity, reproduces, declines and dies. Even unicellular organism do not reproduce indefinitely. All cells are subject to 'the Hayflick effect', which explains the number of times a cell population will divide, before cell division stops.⁵

Human reproduction is one's fundamental right irrespective of caste, creed, religion, race, social, financial and educational status (International Conference on Population and Development).⁶ When to reproduce, how many children to have and how often to have children are all personal decisions.⁷

Health care is multidimensional and involves many facets. While there is a national and universal necessity to limit the family, there exists an equally compelling need to enable barren couples to achieve parenthood. The health policies of the government, private and insurance companies should take cognizance of this fact and modify their approach to provide health care for all.

Infertility is a disease of the reproductive system. It is a global health problem and should be considered as such and all essential physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, financial and social support should be provided, instead of embarking on a blame game or shifting responsibilities.

Healthy and progressive evidence based ideas in reproductive research should be promoted, avoiding the dangerous trend of confusing science fiction with genuine research.

The World Health Organization defines reproductive rights as : Reproductive rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. They also include the right of all to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence.⁸

Reproduction is the law of life. Species which are successful in reproduction continue to thrive. Others decline and disappear. There is increasing concern about declining human fertility. Infertile couple with no governmental or insurance support in most countries, are driven from pillar to post seeking a cure for their barren state, chasing a phantom pregnancy and incurring financial debt. The acknowledgement that 'Reproduction is indeed a fundamental right' and provision of at least essential infertility services through governmental agencies or insurance support to these couples to achieve at least one healthy baby would ameliorate the suffering of these couples. What remains unclear is that if it is a fundamental right of the individual, couple, heterosexual or homosexual or all of them.

References

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