

Factsheet on (unintentional) childlessness

Pregnancy can't be taken for granted.

Even under optimal conditions, the probability of a healthy young woman falling pregnant is only about 25% per cycle. The probability of conceiving falls continuously with age and is on average about 5% for a 35 to 40-year-old woman.¹ Male fertility also declines from around the age of 40-45.²

The average age of first-time mothers in Switzerland is 31.³ Whereas in 1970, 33.1% of women were under 25 years of age at the birth of their first child, this figure had dropped to 5.9% by 2018. In 2018, most first-time mums were between the age of 30 and 35 (38.7%), while 33% were 35 or older.³

After stopping contraception, it takes on average six to twelve months for a woman to fall pregnant.⁴ Nevertheless, every sixth couple in Switzerland remains unintentionally childless.⁵

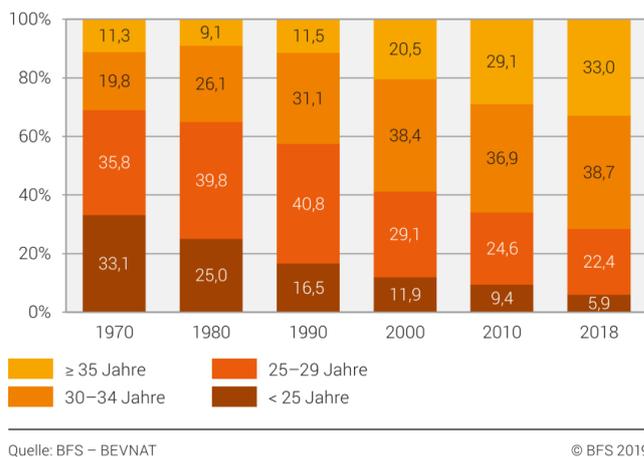


Fig. 1: Living births by age of mother since 1970

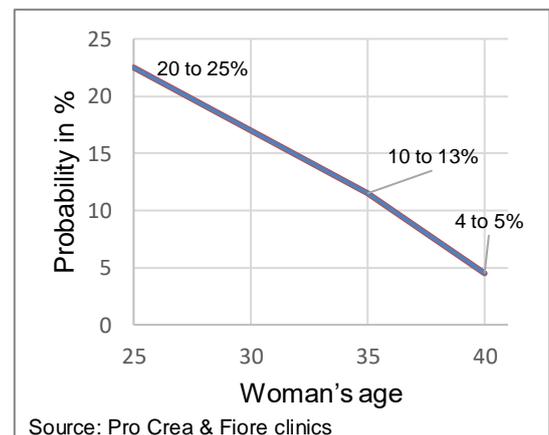


Fig. 2: Probability of conceiving naturally (per cycle)

¹ <https://www.avawomen.com/avaworld/your-fertile-period/>

² <http://www.repro-endo.usz.ch/fachwissen/kinderwunsch-sterilitaet/seiten/ungewollt-kinderlos.aspx>

³ <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/bevoelkerung/geburten-todesfaelle/fruchtbarkeit.html>

⁴ <https://www.tk.de/techniker/gesundheit-und-medizin/schwangerschaft-und-geburt/fruchtbarkeitsstoerungen-was-geschieht-bei-der-befruchtung-2013476>

⁵ <http://www.repro-endo.usz.ch/fachwissen/kinderwunsch-sterilitaet/Seiten/default.aspx>

Around 9% of the population of child-bearing age is affected by infertility

The term infertility describes a person's inability to conceive or give birth to a child. The WHO goes further and describes infertility as the failure of a couple to achieve a clinical pregnancy after 12 months or more of regular unprotected sexual intercourse.

This definition applies to approximately 9% of the population of child-bearing age.⁶ Reasons for infertility can lie with both the woman and the man. Roughly speaking, in about one-third of cases, the cause lies with the man, in one-third with the woman and in one-third with both partners.⁷ Around 50 million couples worldwide remain unintentionally childless.⁸ The sperm count of men examined in industrialised nations has dropped by between 50 and 60% since the 1970s.⁸ In Switzerland, only 38% of men reach the standard values defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO).⁹

Help with infertility

If a couple is struggling to conceive, there are many promising medical options available today. Around 56% of women who are having problems with fertility seek medical advice.¹⁰ In 2017 alone, 5,854 women underwent in vitro fertilisation.¹¹

The success rate is promising: Over 80% of women under the age of 38 give birth to a child after undergoing fertility treatment.¹² And 56% of all women age 35 and above conceive following artificial insemination.¹³

With simple hormonal stimulation with medication in combination with insemination, the chances of success for women under 35 are 18% per cycle.¹⁴ With in vitro fertilisation (IVF), the success rate for women of the same age is 29% per cycle.¹⁵

In Switzerland, every fortieth child born is conceived by artificial insemination. This means that over 27,000 births in Switzerland between 2002 and 2015 were the result of in vitro fertilisation. In 2017 alone, 2,188 babies were born in Switzerland thanks to IVF.¹⁰

⁶ <https://www.fertility.com/ch-de/unerfuellter-kinderwunsch.html>

⁷ <https://www.fiore.ch/de/ihr-weg-zum-wunschkind/ursachen>

⁸ https://www.nanorepro.com/media/pdf/NanoRepro_Unternehmenspraesentation_2018.pdf

⁹ Rahban R, Priskorn L, Senn A, et al. Semen quality of young men in Switzerland: a nationwide cross-sectional population-based study. *Andrology*. 2019;7(6):818–826. doi:10.1111/andr.12645

¹⁰ <https://www.fertility.com/ch-de/kinderwunsch-behandlung.html>

¹¹ <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/gesundheit/gesundheitszustand/reproduktive/medizinisch-unterstuetzte-fortpflanzung.html>

¹² <https://www.fertility.com/ch-de/kinderwunsch-behandlung.html>

¹³ https://www.nanorepro.com/media/pdf/NanoRepro_Unternehmenspraesentation_2018.pdf

¹⁴ <https://www.hfea.gov.uk/treatments/explore-all-treatments/intrauterine-insemination-iui/>

¹⁵ <https://www.hfea.gov.uk/treatments/explore-all-treatments/in-vitro-fertilisation-ivf/>

Fertility disorders change the lives of those affected

The belief or diagnosis of a fertility disorder can be devastating for couples. It turns their lives upside down. This realisation triggers a range of feelings including sadness, helplessness, anger, envy as well as feelings of inferiority and exclusion.¹⁶

A diagnosis of infertility can have a severe psychological impact, causing low self-esteem, emotional disruption and dissatisfaction with life in general, for example. Problems often arise socially, because those affected often withdraw from social activities out of shame or they feel misunderstood and stigmatised, especially when the real reasons for their childlessness go unmentioned.¹⁶

Infertility: a hard-hitting taboo

Men in particular often believe they have unlimited fertility and have little doubt about their own fertility.¹⁷ This is closely related to the dominance of the topic of contraception in the lives of young people and young adults. A study conducted by the German Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) explains: "It never occurs to someone who has used contraception for years since youth that they may be infertile or may require fertility treatment. There is a widespread, well-founded belief that if you don't use contraception (every time you have sex), you run the risk of pregnancy." Therefore, this logically strengthens belief in one's own fertility, which is further reinforced by educational campaigns: "Entertainment and educational media confirm this self-belief in unrestricted fertility, which thus appears as a specific risk of becoming pregnant or conceiving a child. At the same time, the alternative option of perhaps being only partially fertile or infertile is made taboo."¹⁷

Many people never entertain the idea of infertility

Therefore, the creation of the taboo surrounding potential infertility is a mass phenomenon with socio-cultural, socialisation-biographical and political causes.¹⁷ This is why many people never even think about the possibility that they may be infertile. In Germany, 45% of women aged between 30 and 35 have never considered the fact that they might not be able to conceive naturally. With men of the same age, 67% have never thought about this possibility.

A natural consequence of the fact that this topic is taboo is that couples who find themselves confronted with infertility or assisted fertility treatment have few people to talk to. For example, 72% of couples who are struggling to conceive find there is a lack of personal testimonials from those who have already undergone reproductive medical treatment.¹⁷

¹⁶ http://www.gbe-bund.de/gbe10/abrechnung.prc_abr_test_logon?p_uid=gast&p_aid=0&p_knoten=FID&p_sprache=D&p_suchstring=8923

¹⁷ Deutsches Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend; Referat Öffentlichkeitsarbeit (2014): Kinderlose Frauen und Männer