

IVF to have a second+ child: new possibilities or new obstacles?

Successful development of methods of assisted reproduction during past 35 years allowed to significantly alter the problem of infertility in Russia. In 2011, at least 398,3 treatment cycles per 1 million of population happened in this country (in the year 2010 - 279,7 cycles).¹ Currently, the majority of population of reproductive age are can conceive the first child naturally and give it birth, however, having a child of even a second birth order often requires doctors' help, sometimes, even usage of ART.

Though most researches show that attitude to childbearing is more dependent on reproductive desires than on actual social and economic circumstances of future parents, still, obstacles to childbearing can influence the actual resulting number of children a woman has. According to the data presented by «Analytical report on the results of representative surveillance of reproductive plans of population in 2012», slightly more than a half (51,7%) of all studied Russian women, and 47,8% of Russian men, if basic economic conditions were met, would prefer to have two children, and another fourth of studied population claimed that they would prefer to have three children (24,9% of women and 24,3% of men)². However, for the reason of birth postponement and, at some occasions, degrading reproductive health, often IVF is considered, in order to achieve this goal. In such cases, the majority of IVF users are:

- infertile women or couples who already have IVF child (or children), especially if they have cryopreserved embryos or oocytes,
- couples of older reproductive age, who entered second conjugal unions and have no common child in current union, and

¹ RAHR. ART register. 2011 Report, p.20 (in Russian, assessed November 2011) // http://www.rahr.ru/d_registr_otchet/otchet2011.pdf

² Analytical Report on the results of representative surveillance of reproductive plans of Russian population in 2012, assessed November 2011
http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/population/demography/ (опубликовано 24.01.2013г.)

- couples in the intact first union, who already have one (or several) child (children), conceived naturally, but currently became infertile and thus unable to conceive without doctors' help.

An issue of IVF to allow a couple to have a second child is rather new for Russia – here, financial state support for IVF treatment concerns only childless women. Accordingly, even those parents who's first children were conceived with the help of IVF, and they have frozen embryos, consider necessity to go through IVF again as an additional obstacle for having a next child (*forum of Russian IVF patients Probirka.ru, 2007, assessed September 2008.*):

1. [toshana](#) *«I started to ask myself about having a second child just after my 6-th IVF attempt turned out to be successful (I am not even a mother yet, my belly is 36-weeks old)). Unfortunately I have to answer – no, I would not go and have IVF again, I have spent there too much efforts, emotions, and time (10 years). If God allows me to get pregnant naturally (no one, by the ways, knows a reason of my infertility), it will be pleasure, but not IVF, price is also important ».*
2. [yashka](#) *«I did not became a mother yet, but I want more children already [...] My pregnancy was complicated – hospitals, having to lay in bed etc.. My husband is just afraid that next time 2 embryos will implant, so my womb will just burst. And inserting just one embryo, it is having to low a chance for pregnancy... But besides these fears, I would be happy to become pregnant again and again. Still, it is important to be economically well-off to raise children, but I have a huge amount of potential maternal love for even more than two children».*

These quotes demonstrate that subfertile women have various concerns in the matter of having more children, though lack of reproductive desire is not one of them. But economic reasons, as well as the issues of psychological adjustment, reproductive health and age/time remaining to grow children up, often overweight the desire.

In October 2013 a sociological survey of women in several IVF clinics of Moscow was initiated. Only those who wanted to have second+ children became respondents. By the beginning of November 2013, analysis of 296 medical cases has shown that there were 45 women in the studied sample (15,2% of all female IVF patients). These 45 women age was 27-48 years; all were urban (residing in Moscow, Izhevsk, Nizhny Novgorod, Sochi, and Ufa), either married or cohabiting. Five (11%) were in a second union and had no children in this union. 65,6% of women are not working, others are employed, and their jobs require at least BA degree or its professional education equivalent (accountant, manager, medical doctor, company director, lawyer).

The majority have had one birth in their medical history, but not all women stated a precise number of children they gave birth to – 20 participants (44,5%) have 1 child, 4 (9%) – 2 children. At the same time, 15 (30%) have had just one birth, while 5 (11%) claim to have two. Children are aged from three to 20 years.

Nine women (20%) mentioned having отметили 1-3 former IVF attempts, but only three (6,7%) have IVF children, one of them has two IVF children with donor oocytes. 13 (28,9%) conceived their first children without doctor's help. The rest did not state the method of conception of their first children. Five women (11%) had previous unsuccessful IVF attempts in Moscow, Izhevsk, Sochi. One woman had 3 attempts, three have gone through 2 attempts, and one had just 1 unsuccessful treatment protocol.

In 2011 г., share of IVF births in overall number of birth in the country was 0,65% (in 2010, 0,57%), it means that at least 14533 IVF children were born (0,81% of total number of newborns). In 2010, the number was 11417, i.e. 0,65%. As yet, it is impossible to find out what was the share of 2+ children among them, since official statistics does not provide such data. However, according to our research, it is possible to preliminarily define social portrait of IVF patient who addresses the clinic in order to conceive a second child. Approximately, they constitute one sixth of all IVF patients; typically, are 30-40 years old, they are married or cohabiting, and their existing children are older than 3 years.

Differently from a situation with reproductive intention to have a first child, none single woman was present among IVF patients, wanting a 2+ birth. The majority of these women are housewives, but some are career oriented. The latter fact may be caused by the fact that birth of second+ IVF child is to be financed by patients themselves, the state financially helps the infertile only to achieve a first birth, so only the well-off can afford the treatment, i. e., couples where either a man, or woman, or both, have sufficient income. Even inserting the existing cryopreserved embryos in the womb is not free and is to be paid for.

Possible future development of ART in Russia might be affected by conservative backlash of values which some state ideologists try to coerce onto people. Accordingly, there are suggestions to forbid surrogacy, coupled with questioning 'quality' of all IVF children. This might also have negative effect on numbers of ART-conceived children in Russia in near future. Still, the interests of infertile people and of doctors in this situation coincide, and help to form opposition to this possible development.