

A fascination with babies



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Since the birth of Prince George, the British media seems to have become fascinated with babies and many suspect this will spark somewhat of a 'baby boom'. Throughout the world, however, there is a bigger concern regarding declining birth rates. Fertility rates in European countries such as Spain, Greece and the Republic of Ireland have fallen dramatically, and the Middle East is also experiencing a drop in population growth. So what are the reasons for this?

Many claim that the declining rates in the aforementioned European countries are partly due to the economic crisis, and it is hardly surprising. After all, fertility rates often drop in periods of financial stress. They dropped during the US Great Depression in the 1930's and in Russia in the early 1990's when the Soviet Union broke up.

Further afield, Iran's population surged during the last century but in recent years the rate of growth has slowed down, mainly as a result of the birth control policy. However, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has now done something of a

U-turn and ordered an end to the policy by calling for the population to reach 150m from the current 75m.

Mohammed Ismail Motlagh, who heads Iran's population programme, said that its main objective was to avoid producing single-child families. Approximately 150,000 health officials have since been deployed to visit married couples in their homes in an effort to persuade them to have more children.

Unfortunately for many though, getting pregnant is not so easy. According to a report by the WHO in 2010, fertility rates in all six Gulf countries dropped significantly between 1990 and 2008. The UAE, in particular, has one of the fastest declining birth rates in the world, falling from 5.7 children to less than 2 per family in the past 30 years.

The falling rates in the Middle East have been blamed on lifestyle diseases such as obesity and diabetes which have left many women with fertility problems. Polycystic Ovarian Disease has also increased among women as a result of obesity, poor diet and lack of exercise. But it's not just women who have health issues. The average sperm count among men has also halved in recent years, and this has also been blamed on poor lifestyle choices.

So what is being done to help these couples? Governments of Middle Eastern countries are opening up In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) facilities at hospitals and a steady number of private IVF centres are also starting to appear. In February 2011, Emirates Hospital in Dubai became the first private clinic in the region to offer IVF treatment. The increase in private sector facilities was sparked by the UAE's decision to allow private healthcare companies to obtain licenses to practice.

Government and private hospitals in the Gulf are expected to open more IVF centres to cope with soaring demand for the

treatment among infertile couples. Just a few months ago a new clinic opened in Abu Dhabi with the company behind it saying it is planning more facilities in the UAE and other countries in the GCC over the next few years. Fakhiv IVF offers treatments such as IVF, Intra-Cytoplasmic Sperm Injection, Natural Cycle IVF, Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis for recurrent miscarriages, genetic testing of hereditary diseases, male infertility treatment and preserving fertility in cancer patients.

Fertility clinics have already presented married couples with more options than they had a few years ago. An increase in education and literacy among women has also changed the way IVF is perceived and has helped to boost demand for the treatment. The social stigma once associated with IVF has all but disappeared. I've written before about the impact of obesity and the health related issues which come from it, and now that the problem is becoming more widespread, educating couples to make healthy lifestyle choices is key.

Taking care of your health is so important and now seemingly vital for the growth of our population. **MEH**

Durbin PLC is a British company based in South Harrow, London. Established in 1963, the company specialises in supplying quality assured pharmaceuticals, medical equipment and consumable supplies to healthcare professionals and aid agencies in over 180 countries. As well as reacting rapidly to emergency situations, Durbin PLC responds to healthcare supply needs from local project level to national scale programmes. Web address: www.durbin.co.uk Email: L.morgan@durbin.co.uk