

OPINION OF FERTILE WOMEN ON SURROGACY

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ABSTRACT

The study was to assess the opinion of fertile women on surrogacy, done using a qualitative approach with phenomenological research design. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 50 samples for the study, married and willing to give data on the topic. The tool comprised of demographic variables (age, religion, type of family, education, occupation and monthly income) and a questionnaire consisting of open ended questions(10 questions) related to knowledge, attitude & practice about surrogacy. The data was collected by focused group discussion, dividing the sample in to two groups to have small group discussion. 60% of women were in the age group of 36-45 years and 56% had secondary education, 38% were married for 16-25 years and all had children. The results reveal that people had a positive opinion on surrogacy, they were not aware of types or policies. The women opined that: surrogacy (76%) is a better option than adoption (24%) and identification of the surrogate mother should not be revealed. 66% of samples reported that the couple should feed the child. The study helped to create awareness on how surrogate mothers are identified. Fertile women in general consider the surrogate mothers are equal to god. The phenomena evolving from the study are dilemma among women regarding new born care (feeding) rights of the child to know its birth history and surrogacy is better than adoption. The study concludes that continued awareness programmes are needed to deal with this sensitive issue.

Key words: Assisted reproductive technology (ART), Infertility, Dilemma on care of surrogate child, Opinion Survey.

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INTRODUCTION

Nature has given the capacity to procreate life within women and every woman cherishes the experience of motherhood. [1, 2] Unfortunately, some women due to certain physiological conditions cannot give birth to their own off-spring. The desire for motherhood leads them to search for alternative solutions, and surrogacy presents itself as the most viable alternative. [2]

Infertility is defined as one year of unprotected intercourse without pregnancy [3]. According to a World Health Organization report (2009), data from 47 developing countries (excluding China) show that in 2004, an estimated 187 million couples were infertile.[4,5] Infertility, as a stressful life crisis, may affect a person's mental health and negatively impacts the lives of affected couples. Studies have indicated that infertility would be the most upsetting experience for most women and a proportion (15%) of affected men. Over the past 30 years the treatment protocols have considerably improved, but

the overall incidence of infertility has not changed[6]. In recent years, there has been an improvement in the interventions for infertile couples. One of the most popular forms of assisted reproductive technology (ART) is surrogacy. [7]

Advances in assisted reproductive techniques such as donor insemination and, embryo transfer methods, have revolutionized the reproductive environments, resulting in surrogacy as the most desirable option.[2] Surrogacy is a form of assisted reproductive treatment (ART) in which a woman conceives and carries a child in her uterus for an infertile person or couple, and then gives the child to that person or couple.[2] The system of surrogacy has given hope to many infertile couples, who long to have a child of their own. Surrogacy arrangements involve many controversial aspects and engage ethical, moral, psychological and social issues. [6]



The first formal surrogacy was done in US in the year 1976. Since then, radical changes have swept the United States and the rest of the world. [8] Surrogacy has not always experienced the general level of acceptance it has now. It has often generated controversy and was seen as experimental, but has since proven to be a legitimate alternative to family building. [8] It has its own controversies and both positive and negative opinions are held by people. Few of the positive opinions are it is altruistic, it gives hope and is financially rewarding to those who need a child; the negative opinion from public are it is confusing on who is a surrogate mother and it is dangerous: according to public opinion in US.[8]

A study conducted on the Viewpoints of fertile women on gestational surrogacy in East Azerbaijan Province, Iran by Azad Rahmani et al [9] reports that women were positive. The aim of the study was to investigate the viewpoint of fertile Iranian women on gestational surrogacy. In this descriptive cross-sectional study sample were selected by convenient sampling. A total of 185 women participated. Data were collected via a 22-item scale that assessed the viewpoints of the participants in five domains related to gestational surrogacy. Opinion gathered revealed that a significant percentage of them believed that commissioning couples are not the biological owners of the baby, religious barriers need to be considered before legal issues, children born through surrogacy may undergo emotional problems, and the adoption of children is a better option than surrogacy. The study also gathered negative views of the women which showed that public education is needed to increase the acceptability of gestational surrogacy. [9]

In the past, surrogacy was done with family, friends or close relatives, family, usually as an altruistic deed.[2] But, with the introduction of financial arrangements in the process, surrogacy has extended its network beyond family, community, state and even across the country.[2] Slowly but steadily India is emerging as a popular destination for surrogacy arrangements for many rich foreigners due to cheap medical facilities, advanced reproductive technological know-how, poor socio-economic conditions, and lack of regulatory laws in India.[2]

Indian government has taken concern over this issue in 2017[10] and has penned the draft amendment of the bill pertaining to surrogacy which reads that only “altruistic surrogacy” to infertile married Indian couples who are in need will be provided after examining them by a competent authority. It also has looked into the rights of surrogate mothers. [10]

Thus, considering the importance of this issue and its complex nature and the creeping of many clinics volunteering to do this procedure in Tamilnadu and Puducherry we carried out a opinion survey among the fertile women at a selected community area of Puducherry with the aim of knowing the opinion on different aspects of surrogacy among them.

MATERIALS & METHODS

The research approach used was Qualitative and design Phenomenological design. The target population comprised of women aged between 30 to 45 years who are residing in urban area of Muthialpet, Puducherry, all were married and had children. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 50 women who were married and willing to give data on the topic. The tool comprised of demographic variables (age, religion, type of family, education, occupation and monthly income) and a questionnaire consisting of open ended questions (10 questions) related to knowledge, attitude & practice about surrogacy. The data was collected by focused group discussion by dividing the sample in to two groups to have small group discussion.

60% of women were in the age group of 36-45 years and 56% had secondary education, 38% were married for 16-25 years and all had children. The results reveal that people had a positive opinion on surrogacy, they were not aware of types or policies. The women opined that: surrogacy (76%) is a better option than adoption (24%) and identification of the surrogate mother should not be revealed. 66% of samples reported that the couple should feed the child. The study helped to create awareness on how surrogate mothers are identified. Women in general consider that surrogate mothers are equal to god.

The phenomena evolving from the study is described in fig.1.

RESULTS

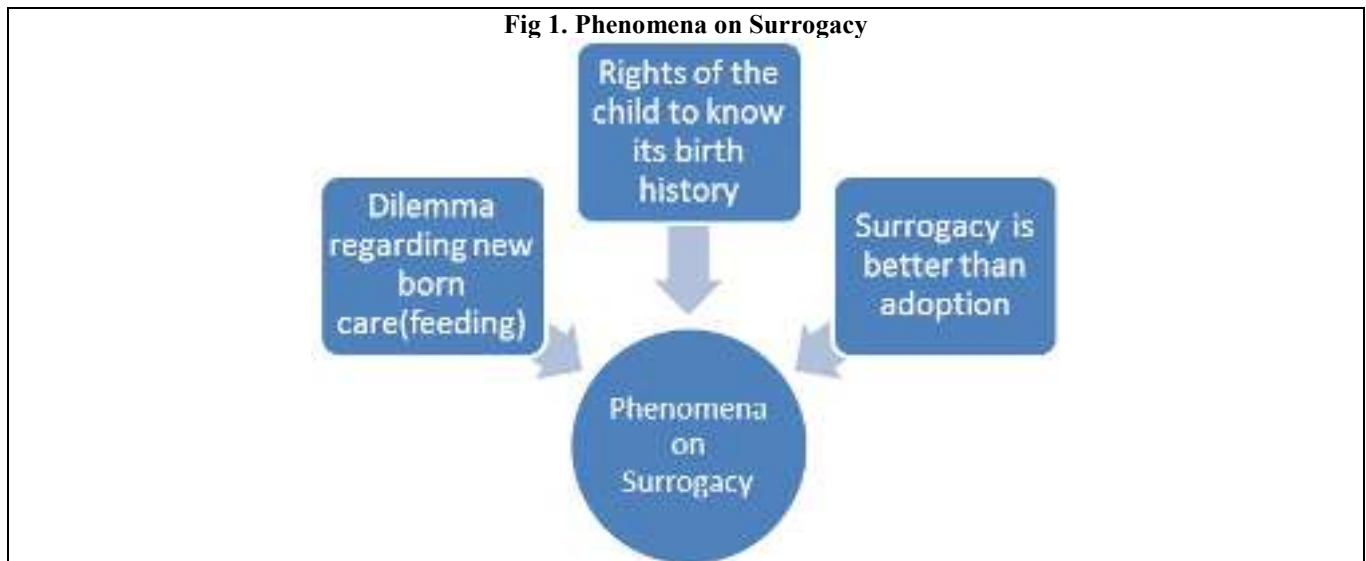
Table 1. Distribution of demographic variable of the study population

| Demographic Variables | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------|-----------|------------|
| n = 50 | | |
| Age | | |
| a) 25 – 35 years | 20 | 40 |
| b) 36 – 45 years | 30 | 60 |
| Religion | | |
| a) Hindu | 49 | 98 |
| b) Christian | 1 | 2 |



| | | |
|-----------------------------|----|----|
| Type of family | | |
| a) Nuclear | 34 | 68 |
| b) Joined | 16 | 32 |
| Education | | |
| a) Illiterate | 11 | 22 |
| b) Primary | 4 | 8 |
| c) Secondary | 28 | 56 |
| d) Higher Secondary | 6 | 12 |
| e) Degree & above | 1 | 2 |
| Occupation | | |
| a) Working | 16 | 32 |
| b) Not Working | 34 | 68 |
| Family Income | | |
| a) < 5000 | 32 | 64 |
| b) 6000 – 10,000 | 16 | 32 |
| c) 11,000 – 15,000 | 2 | 4 |
| d) > 15,000 | - | - |
| Type of Marriage | | |
| a) Consanguinous | 14 | 28 |
| b) Non consanguinous | 36 | 72 |
| Age at Marriage | | |
| a) < 20 years | 35 | 70 |
| b) 21 – 25 years | 14 | 28 |
| c) 26 – 30 years | 1 | 2 |
| Duration of Marriage | | |
| a) < 5 years | 5 | 10 |
| b) 6 – 15 years | 17 | 34 |
| c) 16 – 25 years | 19 | 38 |
| d) > 25 years | 9 | 18 |

Fig 1. Phenomena on Surrogacy



DISCUSSION

The present study was done among women, 56% were secondary school educated and 8 % had primary education. The results reveal that people have a positive opinion on surrogacy, and opine that surrogacy (76%) is better option than adoption. The study done at Iran by Ensiyeh Mohebbi Kian, Hedieh Riazi, and Saeid

Bashirian[11] on Attitudes of Iranian infertile couples toward surrogacy supports the finding to our study that women had a more positive attitude toward surrogacy arrangements than did men, among infertile couples and also surrogacy would be better than adoption (32.6% of infertile women and 26.6% of infertile men).



A public opinion [8] conducted in the internet gives a point that surrogacy is confusing regarding the legal conditions. We also identified this as a factor as the women surveyed had a dilemma whether it is legal and how and who will identify the surrogate mother.

The present study participants have a mixed feeling about whether the child should know about its birth or not, as 66% of samples reported that the couple should feed the child and not by the surrogate mother but 14% of them said that initial one month the baby should be taken care of by the surrogate mother & remaining 20% of them told that baby should be with surrogate mother up to 5 months. This finding is similar to the findings by Azad Rahmani et al [9] where people feel that the child should not know its birth history (73%) but our study is more specific as it reveals about women's opinion on breast feeding and care of child. The study also supports our findings on the stand that surrogate mothers have dignity (83.8%) and are

virtuous (76.8%) as present study participants compare them with god.

Hence the phenomena evolving from the study is dilemma among women regarding new born care (feeding), rights of the child to know its birth history and surrogacy is better than adoption.

CONCLUSION

The present study revealed that fertile women have a positive opinion on surrogacy. This study will help to create awareness among fertile women in the community. Continued Nursing Programme can be conducted to emphasize about surrogacy.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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