

Luzern, March 27th, 2010

**SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE ONLINE****INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOR BY INFERTILE COUPLES**

by Gianna Haake / Nicole Zillien (University of Trier)

## THE PROJECT

**"INTRO - Scientific Knowledge Exchange In Fertility Forums"**

part of the DFG Special Priority Program: "SCIENCE AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC:

Understanding Fragile And Conflicting Evidence"

- Analysis of the ways laymen communicate and absorb scientific knowledge online, based on the use of fertility forums.
- Use of several research methods to get a closer look on scientific knowledge exchange in fertility forums:
  - 1) Semi-structured Interviews with infertile couples
  - 2) A standardized online survey with members of fertility forums,
  - 3) A content analysis of a fertility forum.

## 1. INTRODUCTION: UNWANTED CHILDLESSNESS IN GERMANY

- Approximately 600,000 people in Germany claim the reason of their childlessness to be the failure of getting pregnant [Source: Allensbach-Survey, conducted by Sütterlin and Hoßmann in 2007]
- Since the first German IVF-Baby was born in 1982 the number of treatments per year increased massively from 742 in 1982 to 64.578 in 2007. [Source: German IVF-Register 2007]

## 2. INTERNET USE BY INFERTILE COUPLES

- Research indicates that the internet is increasingly important as a source of information for infertile couples.
- Different studies show that about half of the couples in fertility treatment use the internet as source of information concerning their infertility. [Weissman 2000; Rawal/Haddad 2006]

Aspects of the social web:

<b>Behavioral Component</b>	<b>Practice</b>	<b>Examples taken from infertility forums</b>	<b>Crucial question</b>	<b>Developmental Task</b>
Management of identity	Making aspects of own personality accessible	Creating own profile, reporting on own experiences	Who am I?	Self-examination
Management of relations	Fostering of existing and establishing new relations	Crossing fingers for somebody, writing private messages	Which position do I have in my social network?	Social-examination
Management of information	Selection, filtering, administrating and evaluating of information	Asking medical questions, using search function	How do I orientate myself in the world?	Material-examination

[inspired by Schmidt 2009]

### 3. FERTILITY-FORUMS AS A RESOURCE FOR MEDICAL INFORMATION

#### 3.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

We conducted 32 semi-structured interviews from November 2009 to February 2010.

The aim is a qualitative exploration of the information seeking behavior and knowledge processing of infertile men and women and to create a base for the standardized online survey / the code system of the content analysis.

#### 3.2 INTERVIEWED PERSONS (N=32)

- 30 women, 2 men, average age = 33,5 years (range 22-42)
- Comparatively high education; mostly employed
- 27 IVF/ICSI-patients, 3 inseminations, 2 without treatment
- 23 active users of fertility forums, 6 passive, 3 non-user

### 4. FIRST RESULTS

- The participants actively search for information.
  - Exchange in the forums is perceived by the users as an exchange between "experts on their own behalves".
  - The emotional exchange and reception of information are often closely related.
  - The participants use different strategies to deal with incertitude and contradictions.
- Next steps: Realization of a standardized online survey in cooperation with two fertility forums to evaluate our results.

### 5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Rawal, N./Haddad, N. (2006): Use of internet in infertility patients. In: The Internet Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics, Vol. 5, No. 2.

Schmidt, Jan (2009): Das neue Netz. Merkmale, Praktiken und Folgen des Web 2.0. Konstanz.

Sütterlin, Sabine/Hoßmann, Iris (2007): Ungewollt kinderlos. Was kann die moderne Medizin gegen den Kindermangel in Deutschland tun? Edited by Berlin-Institut für Bevölkerung und Entwicklung.

Weissman, Ariel/Gotlieb, Lynda/Ward, Susan/Greenblatt, Ellen/Casper, Robert F. (2000): Use of the Internet by Infertile Couples. In: Fertility and Sterility, Vol. 73, No. 6, S. 1179–1182.

Deutsches IVF Register (2008): DIR Jahrbuch 2007. Bad Segeberg. Online: [www.deutsches-ivf-register.de](http://www.deutsches-ivf-register.de).