

YOUNG ITALIAN WOMEN'S KNOWLEDGE OF FEMALE FERTILITY AND ITS PRESERVATION: A COGNITIVE SURVEY

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INTRODUCTION: In *Italy*, there is a ***growing trend of delaying motherhood***, with the average maternal age at delivery rising from 31.6 in 2008 to 33 in 2023. However, female fertility begins to gradually decline around the age of 32, with a more rapid decrease after 37. Postponing motherhood is associated with greater difficulties in conceiving, an increased use of ART techniques, and a higher risk of pregnancy complications. Nevertheless, ***Italian women's awareness of their fertility and the related risk factors remains limited***, as highlighted by the National Fertility Study conducted by the Italian National Institute of Health in 2018.

AIMS: The aim of our study is ***to further investigate young women's awareness of their fertility***, including the factors that influence it, when fertility begins to decline, how it can be monitored, and the available options for its preservation. The goal is ***to raise awareness among the female population on these topics and to provide valuable guidance to support informed reproductive choices***.

RESULTS: The study, conducted through ***a cognitive survey***, involved ***a sample of 1,042 women aged between 18 and 40***, recruited between March 28 and May 28, 2024. The results showed ***good awareness of the most fertile age range for women***, with ***93.3%*** of participants correctly ***identifying the 18–29 age range*** as the period of peak fertility. However, ***only 62.6% were aware that fertility begins to decline between the ages of 30 and 39***. Regarding ***knowledge of AMH***, ***only 26.7%*** knew what it is, ***although interest was high: 79.1%*** of women who were previously unaware of the test stated that they are now ***interested in taking it***. Concerning ***fertility preservation techniques***, ***only 42.8%*** of participants were ***familiar with them***, with ***greater awareness of oocyte cryopreservation*** than of embryo and ovarian tissue cryopreservation. ***Knowledge of social freezing*** was also limited: ***only 28.5%*** of participants knew what it was. Nevertheless, ***interest in these topics was high***, with ***97.4%*** of respondents believing that issues related to female fertility deserve greater attention and dissemination.

CONCLUSION: ***The results of this survey***, together with findings from previous studies, ***underscore the need to improve young women's awareness of issues related to female fertility***. To achieve this, ***educational programs should be introduced in schools and public awareness campaigns should be promoted***. Investing in the dissemination of accurate and accessible information can help women make more informed reproductive decisions, allowing them to plan motherhood based on a clear understanding of their fertility and of the preservation techniques available.