

The Journey of Infertility



**HOW DO WOMEN IN NAIROBI, KENYA
NAVIGATE WITHIN DIFFERENT 'FIELDS OF
INFERTILITY'?**

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Introduction



- Experiences of women facing fertility problems
- Footstep to Fertility Center, Nairobi
- 10 weeks
- Snowballing technique
- Thirty in-depth interviews
- Two focus group discussions
- Ethnographic observations

Theory: Social navigation



Social navigation is used for an anthropological analysis of practice. It refers to ‘how people act in difficult or uncertain circumstances and to describing how they disentangle themselves from confining structures, plot their escape and move towards better positions’ (Vigh 2006 : 419).

Theory: The social field



Bourdieu discussed social life as a game. He suggested that, just as in football, the social field consisted of positions occupied by agents (people or institutions) and what happens on/in the field is consequently bounded. There are thus limits to what can be done within a particular field, and what can be done is shaped by the structures of the field and by the position an individual has in the field (Bourdieu 1984: 127).

Findings



- **The experiences of infertility are situated within the structures of different ‘fields’ related to infertility:**
 - Gender
 - Finances
 - Sharing/secretcy
 - Family
 - Religion
- **Women’s position within social environments influence the way women navigate and their ability to control the ‘flow and movements’ of these fields**
- **Women’s position is not just simply related to socio-economic background but rather to their personal position in relation to change**

Findings



- **Example: field of gender**
- **Infertility is a women's problem**
- **Women are held responsible for fertility problems**
- **Different experiences of womanhood in relation to infertility**
- **Different ways of navigating with societal pressure**

Findings: Experiences of womanhood



Anne: Uh, I think uh I think a woman is a man's partner, I am supposed to have children. I have never not wanted to be a mother.

Findings: Experiences of Womanhood



Esther: Euhm, for me being a woman is not about having kids, it's not about having kids, it's about, euhm, it's about, euhm, being able to, be like me, be courageous, be in a position to help others. (...) So I think, euhm, having the ability to stand with people, encourage them in the difficult moments and the happy moments, I feel that is my purpose in life, being there for people, yeah.

Findings: Experiences with societal pressure



Daisy: I don't want people to see me, but I realize life is out there, without friends, without husband, without kids, life is good and it is sweet. Okay, around here they know me, outside there (in town) they don't know me, so I go out there. I don't have much fun around here, I have fun out there, in here I come to sleep, when I'm sleeping nobody will talk bad about me, but out there, I have fun, there is the life.

Findings: Experiences with societal pressure



Eunice: They [the community] usually say I am not old. Then, ehm.. The second thing, I am a committed Christian [active church member, but not a nun], so they [the community] think that I am 'in the church' [as a nun]. So, you know when you are in the church, you can even stay, even 50 years without getting married or having a kid. Because you are, you are in the Church, you are committed to the Church. So no one can ask you, they don't ask me anything.

Recommendations



- More room for *differences* within infertility research and debate
- More research to infertility in Kenya
- Inclusion of men
- Involvement of NGO's and government
- Insurance/financial support

Questions?



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!