



***Think fertility – choice or  
compromise***

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**Now**

***"Lets Talk About Sex"***

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# Why a focus on fertility?

## ■ 2004

- discussion at a BPW Adelaide meeting
- surprising lack of awareness of physiology
- did some research, wrote a paper
- organised an expert speaker
- meeting generated a lot of discussion

## ■ Resolutions

- to make accurate information available for women, and men, where they might access it
- to lobby for socio-economic changes that make fertility choices easier

# The facts about fertility

- *Women*
  - are born with all the eggs they will ever have
  - chance of pregnancy in any month is best before 25
  - fertility starts to decline after 30
  - at 35 the chance of conceiving is half that at 30
  - and at 40 is half that at 35
  - at 40 the IVF pregnancy rate is <10%
- *Men*
  - male fertility declines from 35
  - genetic material in sperm deteriorates with poor lifestyle
  - associated with higher risk of miscarriage and birth abnormalities
- 1 in 6 couples experience fertility problems
  - 30% is solely a male factor
  - 30% is solely a female factor
  - 40% involve both male and female

# The facts about fertility

- *Community perceptions vs reality*
  - 88% of men and 57% of women aged 30-40 believe they will have no problem conceiving
  - 1 in 6 couples experience fertility problems
- *Lifestyle factors*
  - age: IVF can't fix old eggs
  - weight and medical history
  - drugs, smoking and alcohol
  - sexually transmitted diseases

# Facts about society

- Trends
  - decline in teenage births
  - meeting later and marrying later
  - reduced partnering and increased divorce and separation
  - later first births, longer wait after marriage
  - smaller families, more single and couple households
  - women and men having fewer children than they say they want
  - rich women and poor men have fewer children
- Very recent increase
  - predicted in 1980s – boom, bust and echo
- Future implications
  - reducing ratio of workers/taxpayers to retirees/pensioners
  - reducing productivity and standards of living
  - fewer adult children to care for more frail aged parents
  - reduced life satisfaction for those that value family life

# *"It's about women"*

- The public debate
  - media focus is on personal stories about women who are not having babies,
  - the choices they make between family and career,
  - the limited information they have about their biology, and
  - occasionally, the role of men in the decision
- The media portrays individual women as both agent and victim of their destiny:
  - women choose to delay childbirth for reasons related to career and financial independence
  - but they are making uninformed decisions because they are unaware that their fertility declines from 30
  - implied that the women interviewed are as much responsible for, as illustrative of, this trend

# Assumptions in the media debate

- 'normal' women want babies
- women are choosing to put their career and lifestyle ahead of babies - but men aren't
- women need more information about their fertility - but men don't
- women are married to dependable men in financially secure and stable relationships
- "It's a women's problem so women should solve it"
- women *choose*; little acknowledgement that women *compromise*

# Why women are having babies later

- Australia's birth rate is below replacement level because of
  - Historical factors
  - Economic factors
  - Social factors
  - Political factors
  - Private interests

# The impact of Australia's social and economic climate

- Delayed independence, socially and financially
- Pressures for self education
- Failure to launch
- 30 is the new 20
- Women acting responsibly
  - need a financially secure partner
  - need a stable dependable relationship
  - need to be sure they could raise a child if their circumstances changed

# “It’s about society”

- Greater job security
- Guaranteed return to employment
- Fairer working hours, reduce unpaid overtime, prevent time poverty
- Family friendly policies and programs, including breast feeding at work
- Govt funded paid maternity leave and paternity leave
- A nationally coherent preschool and childcare program, with rebates that ensure all families pay the same
- Make it easier to choose to have children

# BPW's role and influence

- Gather women's voices – what they want as well as what they do
- Assess whether it is a women's issue or a family issue – or a society issue
- Synthesise the data and feed it to policy developers with recommendations backed by solid research
- Ignore barriers and take risks
- Tell them what women need, and what we believe needs to change

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