



# HEALTH MATTERS

## • I N - F O C U S •

### *Infertility*

#### *Introduction*

Infertility is defined as a disease of the male or female reproductive system characterized by the inability to achieve pregnancy after twelve months or more of regular unprotected sexual intercourse. It affects approximately one in six people of reproductive age worldwide.

Infertility affects men and women, heterosexual couples, same-sex partners, older individuals, those who are not in sexual relationships and people with certain medical conditions (e.g. some Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) sero discordant couples and cancer survivors).

#### *Causes of infertility*

- **Males:** Due to problems with ejaculation, low or absent sperm count, or abnormalities in sperm morphology and motility.
- **Females:** Due to various abnormalities involving female reproductive and endocrine systems.
- **Common causes:** Lifestyle factors such as smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, obesity and exposure to environmental pollutants.



#### *Infertility and mental health*

##### Psychological effects:

- Emotional distress. Feelings of sadness, frustration and anxiety due to the inability to conceive.
- Stigma and social pressure. Infertility may be perceived as a personal failure.

##### Social impacts:

- Relationship strain. The stress and emotional burden associated with treatment can create tension in relationships, leading to communication challenges and conflicts between partners.
- Family dynamics. Expectation is not met.
- Financial burdens. Costs associated with infertility treatments are considerable resulting in financial strain as this is not covered by South African Military Health Service (SAMHS).

##### Career impact:

- The demands of fertility treatments may interfere with employment.

#### *Recommendations and coping mechanisms*

- **Seek support:** Reach out to friends, family or support groups.
- **Prioritise self-care:** Take time to prioritise self-care activities.
- **Set boundaries:** Communicate personal needs and limits openly and assertively.
- **Educate oneself:** Educate oneself about infertility, treatment options and alternative paths to parenthood.
- **Consider therapy:** Consider seeking psychological therapy.

##### References:

World Health Organization. Infertility. 28 November 2025, Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/infertility>. Date accessed 28/01/2026

Choudhary P, Dogra P, Kumar K. Harmonising Infertility and Mental Health: Why it Matters? Ann Neurosci. 2025 Jan;32(1):5-7. doi: 10.1177/09727531251316959. Epub 2025 Feb 25. PMID: 40017571; PMCID: PMC11863206.