

Breaking the silence around infertility: statement for the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25¹

Despite progress towards achieving comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights for all, data from across the world show that approximately 186 million couples worldwide suffer from infertility and involuntary childlessness. The devastating effects of infertility include psychological distress, intimate partner violence, marital instability, risky sexual behaviours, economic hardship, stigma and exclusion. Infertility and involuntary childlessness cut across gender, class, race, age, geographical location, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity. (Starrs et al.2018). However, infertility and involuntary childlessness still remain invisible and highly tabooed and are rarely discussed.

The UN is heading to hold The Nairobi Summit to celebrate the 25th anniversary “ on International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD25) in November 2019. The heart of the Nairobi Summit is a Global Commitment to:

1. Zero unmet need for family planning
2. Zero preventable maternal deaths and
3. Zero gender-based violence and harmful practices against women, girls and youth.

Even within the three Zero commitments we are concerned that there is an absolute silence around infertility and involuntary childlessness. We the undersigned organizations, academics and individual experts, write to express our collective concerns regarding the draft commitment which will be adopted by the Governments at Nairobi. <https://www.nairobisummiticpd.org/>

We request a desire to consider a fourth pillar of zero unmet need in SRHR:

Universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights is one of the cornerstones of population and development programmes, and is a key target of the SDGs 3.7, 5.6 and 4. It rests on the premise that all couples and individuals have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education and means to do so. However, it is equally important to include infertility, involuntary childlessness, a voluntary childfree status with the associated stigma, discrimination and unmet need for access to safe and affordable, quality treatment and management including psychosocial support as important reproductive health and rights issues within local and global-policy initiatives.

¹ The Breaking the silence around infertility: statement for the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 was developed during the Share-Net International SRHR Co-creation Conference “Engaging in Knowledge Translation Together”, which took place from the 8th until the 10th October 2019 in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Participants developed knowledge products to influence policy and practice around Infertility.

Indeed, 25 years post-Cairo, it is time to rethink the meaning of reproductive “rights” through a framework that includes infertility and involuntary childlessness. We urge UN agencies, governments and partners to reflect on ICPD 25 commitment and include/visibilise infertility and involuntary childlessness as SRHR and public health concern.

This statement is endorsed by

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Monday 11th of November 2019, Amsterdam, The Netherlands



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