



## **IRHEC Network Newsletter**

Welcome to the inaugural International Reproductive Health Education Collaboration Network Newsletter!

### ***IRHEC's short history***

The 4th European Conference on Preconception Health and Care in Copenhagen in 2019 spawned conversations among participants about the importance of improving people's awareness about fertility and its limitations. On the back of these conversations, IRHEC's current Chair, Professor Joyce Harper, joined by other fertility education enthusiasts, produced an educational poster with facts about fertility. This poster was endorsed by many organisations and is now [freely available](#) in multiple languages.

Since then, a multidisciplinary collective of people from many different countries with an interest in fertility health promotion have worked together and established the organization that was initially called the International Fertility Education Initiative (IFEI), but we now call IRHEC. The reason for the name change is that we realised that the term 'fertility' is associated with having children and that is not the sole focus of the IFEI. This has especially been highlighted in the work we have done with schools, where we have realised the importance of covering the life course of reproductive health which is important for all, whether people want children or not. We also wanted to highlight that we want to work collaboratively.

We are supported by the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE) and have our very own [webpage](#) on the ESHRE website! Please take some time to browse the content. You can also read about our mission and goals in a [paper](#) published in Human Reproduction Open in 2021.

### ***IRHEC's structure***

We currently operate as a committee with members from many different countries. Professor Harper chairs the committee which meets every two months. Processes for seeking committee membership and nominating and voting for committee positions will be established in 2023 and published on our webpage by the end of the year.

### ***IRHEC Network***

In the last couple of years, we have been contacted by people from around the world who share our interest in fertility health education. To help us stay connected as a community of people with a passion for fertility education, we established the IRHEC Network.

People who want to join the Network are asked to send some information about themselves to Dr Randi Sylvest [rasy@sund.ku.dk](mailto:rasy@sund.ku.dk) who is working on a membership database which will be available on the website in 2023. The idea is that Network members will be able to connect with others and establish collaborations through the Network tab on the website.

Our inaugural Network member meeting was held on zoom in September 2022. It was attended by 20 people from 12 different countries and was a great opportunity to share thoughts about potential future collaborations.

To keep Network members informed and connected we plan to host 1-2 zoom meetings a year and publish a newsletter every six months. We also encourage Network members to contact us if they want to contribute to IRHEC's work or have ideas for collaborative projects.

## ***IRHEC current projects***

Committee members are currently working on six projects.

### **1. Publications, led by Bola Grace**

In line with IRHEC's mission and key strategic goals, this subgroup has focused on collating a list of research publications on fertility awareness. We developed a user-friendly repository of published papers on the topic. The peer-reviewed papers can be accessed in the 'published papers' section of the IRHEC website. Publications can be sorted by: 'year', 'country', and several keywords, centered around the themes of: 'Knowledge, attitudes & behaviours'; 'Education'; 'Study groups and Inclusiveness'; 'Methods'; and 'Type' of study. This IRHEC database has proven to be very popular with many stakeholders who are interested in fertility awareness, especially research students and supervisors. The list is periodically updated so if you have any publications to share, please reach out to us. We would love to hear from you!

### **2. Language and inclusivity, led by Heidi Mertes**

This group is focused on the particular problem of framing fertility health messages in such a way that those receiving the messages do not (or minimally) experience anxiety, stigma, blame or other negative emotions. We recently submitted a paper focusing on 5 recommendations regarding this topic. Our recommendations are: 1) to frame fertility awareness messages with (reproductive) autonomy in mind and to aim for inclusion of those who do not represent the traditional nuclear family; 2) ensure fertility health messages are empathetic and steer clear of blame; 3) avoid scaremongering and offer a positive angle; 4) address both women and men in fertility health messaging; and 5) tailor messages to particular contexts and audiences and develop resources in close collaboration with the target groups. Upon publication of this paper, the link will be shared on the IRHEC website.

### **3. Knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, led by Ilse Delbraere**

People's knowledge about fertility and attitudes towards having children have been studied extensively in the last decade, particularly to investigate factors that contribute to delayed parenthood. Juliana Pedro and others have provided a nice overview of the fertility knowledge literature in a systematic review (2018). Pedro concluded that there are several gaps in the literature. The objective of this group is to monitor research conducted after 2018 on fertility knowledge, attitudes and behaviours and identify gaps, and to summarise our findings in narrative reviews. Currently a narrative review on men's attitudes and behaviours regarding family building decisions (global perspective) and a narrative review on gaps in literature on fertility knowledge are in progress.

### **4. Develop educational resources, led by Juliana Pedro**

The first goal of this group was to find and list existing educational resources to increase fertility awareness. In this list, we included all educational materials that are freely available online. These materials can be accessed in the "[IRHEC Resources](#)" section of the IRHEC website. Resources are organized by format: posters, videos, teaching resources, websites, and interactive tools. If you are interested in fertility awareness, if you are a health professional, or if you want to have children, these materials might be useful for you.

The second goal is to develop new educational resources on themes that are not covered yet. We are currently working on developing factsheet on PCOS, endometriosis, age-related fertility decline, and infertility tests.

#### **5. Evaluation of educational resources, led by Mariana Veloso Martins**

Over the last decade a vast amount of educational resources has been developed in an effort to make evidence-based information about fertility and fertility treatments or choices to available to different populations. This group's goal is to a) systematize recommendations to increase the feasibility and efficacy of implementation efforts of resources designed to increase fertility awareness and/or prevent infertility; and b) to describe the best evidence on the effectiveness of tools designed to improve fertility knowledge.

#### **6. Social media project, led by Joyce Harper**

Studies show that fertility and reproductive health education should be given in a variety of ways, starting in schools, but extending through social media, doctors surgeries, books, web sites, etc.

Social media is used for education of the public on a variety of topics. A team from the IRHEC network have ethics approval from the Institute for Women's Health, University College London, to look at author profiles and content analysis of social media posts using hashtags such as #fertilityed #fertilityeducation #fertilityawareness #reproductivehealth and #reproductivehealtheducation. The team are going to examine Twitter, Instagram, Tiktok, YouTube and LinkedIn. Through this work we want to establish who are influencing fertility education, what information they are posting and which types of posts are most effective. We can use this information to determine how the IRHEC can deliver fertility education on social media.

If you have questions about or are interested in contributing to any of the projects, please contact the lead person.

### ***The story of Network members Dr Dora Vesztergom and Dr Katalin Szöllősi***

In Hungary, assisted reproductive care was taken over by the government in 2020, infertility treatments became completely financed by the social insurance, which clearly represents the government's goal that every desired child can be born.

To support the implementation of the government's investment in infertility care, the Ministry of Interior established the Human Reproduction Department of the National Healthcare Service Centre in 2022. As part of this, we are responsible for the central professional management of assisted human reproduction institutions and the establishment of a consistent high-quality infertility care in Hungary. We are currently developing professional concepts on the development of educational and communication programs for the population, as well as for health care professionals and sustaining close contact with various actors of Hungarian healthcare system.

Besides ensuring optimal infertility care, we also place great emphasis on improving fertility awareness in the population and among health and education professionals. That is why we are very pleased to join the IRHEC Network and hope to draw on the expertise of the membership for fertility health promotion aspect of our work.

### ***Looking ahead***

As we continue to develop the IRHEC we hope fertility health education will become more widespread and that people's awareness about fertility improves to allow them to make the best decisions they can to achieve their parenthood goals (which may be to not have children!).

To help us realise this, we encourage Network members to use the resources we currently have on the IRHEC webpage to promote fertility awareness. On the [Publication page](#) we have listed papers relating to fertility awareness and education and on the [Resources page](#) existing fertility education resources can be viewed.

Through the course of 2023 we aim to add a Network page where members can find up-to-date information about IRHEC and its activities.

The Committee and Network members will meet face-to-face at the annual [ESHRE conference](#) which this year will be held in Copenhagen. If you plan to attend the meeting, we hope to see you at the 'IRHEC Meet and Greet' which will be held between 5 and 6.30 pm on 26/6 (venue to be advised).

