

# Single women seeking fertility treatment rises

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By Lynne Kelleher

Irish women are following the example of Hollywood stars such as Sandra Bullock and Charlize Theron in choosing single motherhood, as a leading fertility clinic recorded a sharp rise in single, female patients.

Madonna famously adopted her fourth child Mercy after her marriage split, while both Sheryl Crowe and Charlize Theron made the choice to become mothers without a male partner.

The number of single Irish women seeking treatment to help them have a baby at a leading fertility clinic, the Institut Marques clinic in Spain, has doubled since 2011, from 15 to 31 last year.

Already this year, 33 single Irish women have flown to the Barcelona clinic, and it is estimated the number will double by the end of the year.

Dr Hans Arce, assisted reproduction consultant at the Institut Marques clinic in Dublin, said more and more Irish women were opening up to having a child on their own later in life.

He said: "There is a lot less fear of these treatments.

"There is a lot more information. Whereas a lot of times before, people would just say 'I'm too old and I just won't have kids', now they are saying 'My ovaries might be too old but I'm not, I want to have a kid' and they seek help. It is increasing all over the place."

Recent research in Spain found that one in every five reproduction treatments are now performed for single women.

More Irish women are thought to be opting for fertility treatment later in life due to the difficulties many single-parent families face in adopting, together with single motherhood becoming an accepted personal choice in society.

The Spanish clinic — which treated 231 Irish patients last year — estimates that single women under 37 have a 33% chance of pregnancy through intrauterine insemination from a sperm bank, while the chances of pregnancy increase to 64% with IVF and sperm donation.

Single Irish women are also offered the option of using donated sperm and a donated egg at the clinic, which is reported to have a 68% chance of success when used with IVF. Egg donation is most commonly used when a woman is unable to produce her own eggs. This can either be done through a donation from a friend or relative, or through an unknown donor.

Meanwhile, new research by private healthcare search engine WhatClinic.com has revealed the number of Irish couples seeking to jet out to the Czech Republic and Spain for treatment is soaring.

The Czech Republic has seen the biggest surge in fertility tourism from Ireland, with inquiries for IVF up a staggering 463% on the site.

Inquiries for egg donation in the eastern European country have almost doubled, with searches up by 188% in the past year, while searches fell by almost half (47%) in Ireland. Whatclinic reveals that, in Ireland, this treatment costs an average of €5,537, whereas in the Czech Republic, it costs €4,877.

Despite Spain commanding the highest price, at €6,317 for egg donation, inquiries have risen by more than a third (35%) in the past year. Caelen King, CEO of Whatclinic.com said there had been a significant lean towards travelling overseas for treatments in the past year.

He said: "In some cases, cost may play a big factor in this decision, but often patients are travelling to countries for specific clinics that have increased expertise or treatments that are not available here."

One of the less common treatments, embryo donation, has seen the biggest growth of inquiries in Spain, up 700% in the past year on the whatclinic site.

Spain is the cheapest option, with one treatment costing an average of €2,500, compared to the Czech Republic at €3,225, and Ireland at €3,500.

The process involves a spare fertilised embryo of a couple's successful IVF treatment being given to another woman unable to conceive.

Mr King urged couples to carefully consider all the options when choosing where to undergo fertility treatment. He said: "Fertility treatment, such as IVF, can be a long and difficult process so it's incredibly important to choose a clinic you're comfortable with."

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