

If a couple has actively tried to become pregnant for one year without success, they are defined as infertile. Infertile people can get help to try to become pregnant. During the period 2015–2017, approx. 2,500 Norwegian children per year were born as a result of assisted conception. This accounts for approx. 4% of all children born in Norway each year.

Background

There are several assisted conception methods. IVF treatment (in vitro fertilisation) is the most common. The principle is that eggs are retrieved from the woman’s ovaries and mixed with sperm, and fertilisation takes place in a glass dish. The fertilised egg develops into an embryo over 2–5 days, and the embryo is then transferred to the woman’s uterus. Any embryos left over can be frozen for use later.

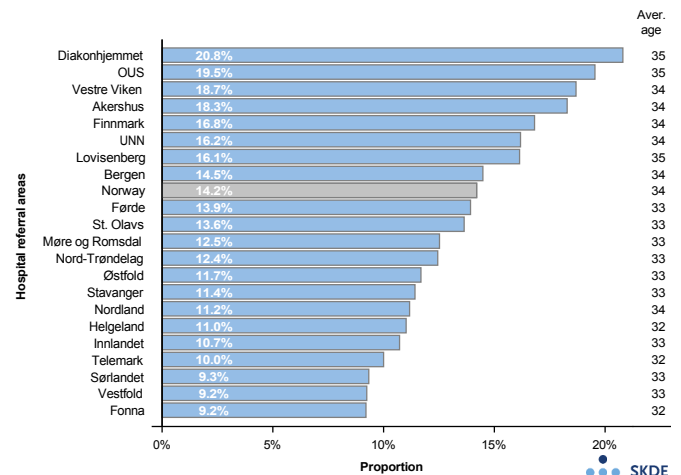
Before retrieving eggs from the woman, preparatory hormone treatment is required in order to ensure that one or more eggs mature and are released at the same time. The hormone treatment is also intended to ensure that the uterus is prepared to receive and retain the embryo when the time comes. About half of all who receive IVF treatment in Norway succeed in becoming pregnant and having a child. It is recommended that the woman should not be older than 38–40 years, as treatment is often less successful with increasing age.

Six public hospitals and several private clinics offer assisted conception services. The price of the treatment is the same at all the public hospitals, while the private providers charge different prices. ‘Patient payment’ or higher patient charges have been introduced for assisted conception. It is intended to cover expenses relating to consumables or other services in addition to the patient charge, and the amounts are not included in the basis for exemption cards. The patient payment is NOK 1,500 per treatment cycle, and each couple is given three attempts at public hospitals. Couples who want more than three attempts have to go to private clinics and pay the full costs.

Results

During 2015–2017, about 3,800 women a year underwent publicly funded IVF treatment. Most women who received IVF treatment during this period were between 29 and 39 years old, and the average age was 33.6 years.

In Lovisenberg hospital referral area, which had the highest rate, 28% more women had IVF treatment than in the OUS area, which had the second highest rate. If we exclude Lovisenberg, variation was moderate, with the rate of OUS hospital referral area being about twice as high as that of Nordland.



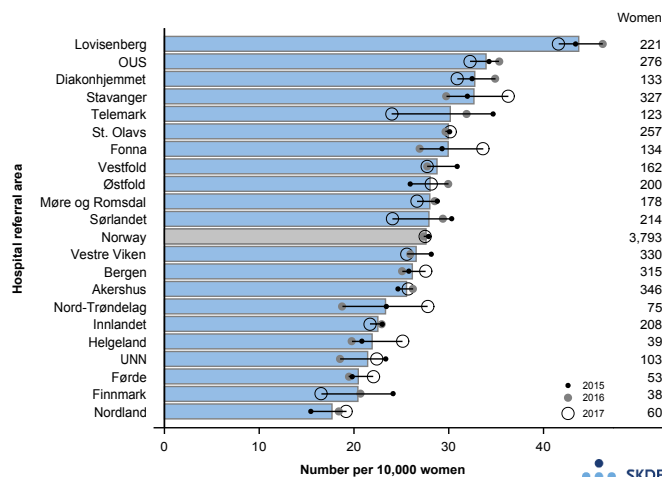
Source: NPR/SSB

Percentage of women who received IVF treatment who were 39 years or older. The average age of the women in the sample on the right.

The proportion of women giving birth at the age of 39 years or older also varies greatly between hospital referral areas. In the Diakonhjemmet and OUS areas, around 20% of women who received IVF treatment had reached an age when a high success rate cannot be expected.

Comments

There is no known geographical variation in infertility to indicate that there should be any significant geographical variation in the use of IVF. The geographical variation in the average age of first-time mothers is so small that women’s choices regarding when they want to have children can hardly explain the observed variation. Nor is it likely that the variation is entirely due to chance. This means that there is reason to question whether the use of IVF is equitably distributed.



Source: NPR/SSB

Number of IVF treatments per 10,000 women, adjusted for age, average per year 2015–2017 broken down by hospital referral area. The sample is limited to women in the age group 16–55 years.