**Is this child yours?**

[Zara Maqbool](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/zara-maqbool)

August 17, 2023

[Opinions](https://www.nation.com.pk/opinions), [Columns](https://www.nation.com.pk/columns)

According to Erik Erikson, a German-American psychoanalyst, “Parenthood is the ‘procreative’ core of generative adulthood.” It simply means that in adulthood, most people need to have children, nurture and contribute to the next generation, and participate in a natural cycle of life. Unfortunately, some couples cannot conceive children naturally due to male or female infertility. In 1978, the ‘In-Vitro Fertilisation method was introduced, commonly known as IVF, and the first baby, called a ‘test-tube baby,’ was born via IVF. It is a complicated but moderately successful process where a female egg is extracted from a woman’s ovaries and fertilised with sperm in a laboratory to form an embryo. The embryo is placed in the woman’s womb to grow and develop.
IVF is expensive, and the struggles that come with IVF are real, especially for a woman whose bodies are pumped with tons of hormones as part of the process, affecting their physical and mental health as a result. The pressure is also immense on the man; in terms of finances, for example, each IVF round means around $10,000, if not more, and most couples go through multiple rounds before they can conceive. It’s not only money, but if male infertility is the root cause, it has a bearing on the man’s psyche, especially in our culture; it’s not an easy reality for a man to digest, and shame is attached to the inability for the man or woman who has infertility challenge.
A social stigma is attached to IVF, and a culturally toxic message, is projected onto a couple full of blame and disgrace as if it is this childless couple’s fault and they are choosing an easy way out by opting for IVF. Another challenge is that many couples are apprehensive about the idea of an embryo in a petri dish in a laboratory due to some mix-ups at fertility clinics over the years where more than once, an embryo of a woman was mistakenly implanted in another mother-to-be.
Religion is an important consideration in Pakistan, and again its believed that the couple is taking matters into their hands and defying the will of the higher power, which makes the child illegal or haram. IVF is legal in Pakistan, but many consider this process haram or religiously unlawful and sinful.
Research shows that the process of assisted reproduction gravely affects mental health and causes anxiety, depression, and stress, and can impact the self-esteem of both partners. This gets amplified, especially after a failed IVF cycle that makes the IVF journey challenging.
Couples must start therapy with IVF and understand and accept that infertility and its resolution through this process has its baggage and will trigger complex feelings. Times like this will also trigger old wounds, so there is internal chaos that each partner is going through that will be painful. On top of that are medical treatments that are painful and have an impact on emotional well-being, and can be pretty traumatic.
A couple needs all the support they can get from family and the community during this time. They need to be encouraged and offered empathy and no judgment. There needs to be more social awareness created around IVF so misperceptions can be challenged and baseless ideas do not feed the couple’s anxieties.
The journey of parenthood is arduous, starting from conception and in the future. Practice more tolerance for novel ideas as the world evolves, and don’t let personal biases get in the way of someone’s dream of childbirth. Let it be their process and offer support so they can fulfill their dream of having a child, and the last thing they need is doubt which questions if that child is their own.