



East African Journal of Health and Science

eajhs.eanso.org

Volume 8 Issue 1, 2025

Print ISSN: 2707-3912 | Online ISSN: 2707-3920

Title DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/2707-3920>



EAST AFRICAN
NATURE &
SCIENCE
ORGANIZATION

Original Article

Talking About Infertility in Kenya: An Analysis of News Stories Posted on Social Media

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Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajhs.8.1.2726>

Date Published: ABSTRACT

26 February 2025

Keywords:

Infertility,
Kenya Couples,
News,
Media,
YouTube Users.

In many cultures, infertility is a health issue that is not discussed, especially in public. In Kenya, the fertility rate, slightly over 3 births per woman, has been in decline, and while some couples are deciding to have fewer children, some are diagnosed with infertility. African countries generally tend to have a low primary infertility rate but high secondary infertility rates; infertility is more common after a successful first birth. Because many health and social factors have relevance, this paper explores narratives about infertility in news videos posted on YouTube in Kenya. The researchers analyzed 20 videos that met the criteria: posted 7 years ago or less and less than 20 minutes long. Results reflect concerns about stigma, stress, and fertility treatment options. The implications are important for educating more couples about getting assistance for infertility

APA CITATION

Moore, D. & Onsomu, E. O. (2025) Talking About Infertility in Kenya: An Analysis of News Stories Posted on Social Media. *East African Journal of Health and Science*, 8(1), 103-110. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajhs.8.1.2726>.

CHICAGO CITATION

Moore, DaKysha and Elijah O. Onsomu. 2025. "Talking About Infertility in Kenya: An Analysis of News Stories Posted on Social Media". *East African Journal of Health and Science* 8 (1), 103-110. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajhs.8.1.2726>

HARVARD CITATION

Moore, D. & Onsomu, E. O. (2025). "Talking About Infertility in Kenya: An Analysis of News Stories Posted on Social Media", *East African Journal of Health and Science*, 8(1), pp. 103-110. doi: 10.37284/eajhs.8.1.2726.

IEEE CITATION

D., Moore & E. O., Onsomu "Talking About Infertility in Kenya: An Analysis of News Stories Posted on Social Media", *EAJHS*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 103-110, Feb. 2025.

MLA CITATION

Moore, DaKysha & Elijah O. Onsomu. "Talking About Infertility in Kenya: An Analysis of News Stories Posted on Social Media". *East African Journal of Health and Science*, Vol. 8, no. 1, Feb. 2025, pp. 103-110, doi:10.37284/eajhs.8.1.2726.

INTRODUCTION

Infertility is a health problem that affects millions across the globe. During the childbearing years, it affects an estimated one in six couples. It is defined as trying to conceive a child for at least 12 months without using contraceptives (WHO, 2024) and 6 months or less for those aged 35 and older (Cross, 2024). Couples may be diagnosed with either primary infertility—not being able to conceive at all—or secondary infertility—not being able to conceive after a previous pregnancy (Cleveland Clinic, 2023).

In African countries, the primary infertility rate averages 10% (Gerais & Rushwan, 1992), with secondary infertility rates ranging from as low as 5% to over 20% (Cates et al., 1985; Larsen 2000; 2003). A recent study (Abebe et al., 2020) found high secondary infertility rates in East African countries but reported infertility data in some African countries may not be accurate (Njogu et al., 2022).

Reasons for infertility, across the globe, vary, but both men and women can contribute. Men could be the main person responsible in up to 30% of cases (Vander Borgh & Wyns, 2018). Couples who plan to have a child after the age of 35 are advised to meet with healthcare providers to discuss all possible complications and options to achieve a healthy pregnancy (Owen et al., 2024). The objective of this study is to understand how messages about infertility are presented in news stories posted on YouTube in Kenya.

METHODS

This study was designed to elucidate how news stories, including studio interviews, posted on YouTube frame the health issue of infertility. More than two billion people across the world use the social media site, and more than a billion hours of content are watched daily (YouTube official blog, n.d.). Many people get their news from a social

media platform. In Kenya, an estimated more than 50% of survey respondents cite Facebook WhatsApp, and YouTube as their source of news stories. The report also shows, that in Kenya, social media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok have seen an increase in the number of people who report using the sites for news (Gicheru & Nyabuga, 2024). Therefore, the researchers decided to focus on YouTube to analyze the messages about infertility. Therefore, continuously monitoring messages about reproductive health on social media platforms is important.

To locate news stories focusing on infertility in Kenya, the researchers searched “Kenya and infertility,” “infertility in Kenya,” and “infertility and Kenya.” Inclusion criteria were 1) the word *infertility* was in the title on YouTube; 2) video duration was less than 20 minutes; 3) the video originated from a newspaper or television news source; 4) most of the video was in English or had subtitles; and 5) the video was posted within the past 7 years. Videos produced by infertility clinics were excluded. The goal of 20 videos was achieved, and the researchers conducted the analysis during the summer of 2024.

The study methodology is content analysis, a systematic means of understanding text or images (Krippendorff, 2019). Here, content analysis addressed videos and comments produced by news organizations. The messages examined were objectively measured using coding categories (Neuman, 2007). To develop them, the researchers used topics surrounding infertility—reasons, treatments, and stigma. For codes associated with YouTube users, the researchers started with likes, dislikes, video time, and subscribers. After watching the first three videos to gain a better understanding of possible codes, 16 were developed and operationalized for numeric coding (see Table 1). The researchers then discussed the definitions to make sure they were applicable to the study outcomes.

Table 1: Categories and Definitions

Coding Categories	Definitions
Length of video (in seconds)	20 minutes or less
Year uploaded	less than one month to 7 years
Likes	number of likes presented on the video page
Dislikes	number of dislikes presented on the video page
Views	number of views identified on the video page
Subscriber	number of people who subscribed to the uploaded video
Comments	number of comments about the story
Personal stories	stories providing information about someone or a couple struggling with infertility (past or present)
Medical explanation	information is given to explain the overall meaning of infertility
Treatment	information is given about treatments for infertility
Financial	discussion of the monetary cost of infertility treatments
Stigma	discussion of stigma associated with infertility
Medical staff	use of a medical expert to explain health issues related to infertility
Infertility type	discussion of a specific type of infertility
Men's health	discussion of health issues that could affect a man's fertility

After coding the videos using an Excel file, the data were analyzed using SPSS version 28.0 (IBM Corp., 2021). Statistical tests included central tendency, the Spearman Correlation, and independent t-tests.

RESULTS

The study analyzed 20 videos. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the study variables. Most of the videos (n = 14; 70%) had $\geq 1,001$ views, while 4 (20%) had between 101-500 views. Seven (35%) discussed male fertility; 13 (65%) were delivered by

a medical professional and came from sources with millions of subscribers.

Most of the analyzed videos focused on personal perspective (n = 12; 60%), talked about treatment for infertility (n = 14; 70%), addressed financial aspects related to infertility treatment (n = 11; 55%), and/or discussed social stigma (n = 15; 75%). A quarter (n = 5; 25%) presented medical information explaining infertility.

Table 2: Characteristics of Infertility Discussions in Kenyan News Posted on YouTube

Study Variables	n	%
Views		
0-100	1	5
101-500	4	20
501-1,000	1	5
$\geq 1,001$	14	70
Subscribers		
Less than 1,000	1	5
Thousands	6	30
Millions	13	65
Personal perspective		
Yes	12	60
No	8	40
Medical information explaining infertility		

Study Variables	n	%
Yes	5	25
No	15	75
Treatment for infertility		
Yes	14	70
No	6	30
Financial aspects		
Yes	11	55
No	9	45
Social stigma		
Yes	15	75
No	5	5
Infertility type		
Primary	0	0
Secondary	0	0
Not mentioned	20	100
Both	0	0
Discussion of male infertility		
Yes	7	35
No	13	65
Medical professional		
Yes	13	65
No	7	35

For the video background (n = 20), the mean number of seconds spent viewing the videos was 392.95 (6.55 minutes). The standard deviation was 208.01 seconds (3.47 minutes), with a minimum of 129 seconds (2.15 minutes) and a maximum of 982 seconds (16.37 minutes). The mean time in years the

video was posted was 3.1 with a standard deviation of 2.1. The mean number of likes was 18.35 with a standard deviation of 31.94. The mean number of comments was 7.2 with a standard deviation of 19.94 (see Table 3).

Table 3: Video Background

Variable	n	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Seconds	20	392.95	208.01	129	982
Time video posted (time year)	20	3.1	2.1	0	7
Likes	20	18.35	31.94	0	141
Comments	20	7.2	19.94	0	90

Note: SD – standard deviation; Min. – minimum; Max. - maximum

The findings indicate a moderate positive relationship between number of likes and seconds spent watching ($r_s = 0.445$); the latter explains 19.8% of the variance in the number of likes ($p = 0.049$). Also, a strong positive relationship between

the number of likes and comments was observed ($r_s = 0.773$), with comments explaining 59.75% of the variance in the number of likes ($p = 0.0001$; see Table 4).

Table 4: Bivariate Spearman Correlation

Correlations			Likes	Seconds	Comments
Spearman's rho	Likes	Correlation Coefficient	1	0.445*	0.773**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.049	0.0001
		N	20	20	20
	Seconds	Correlation Coefficient	0.445*	1	0.203
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.049		0.392
		N	20	20	20
	Comments	Correlation Coefficient	0.773**	0.203	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.0001	0.392	
		N	20	20	20

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

DISCUSSION

The study gives a snapshot of how infertility is described in news stories posted on YouTube in Kenya. The study shows 65% ($n = 13$) were posted by news organizations that have more than a million subscribers and 30% ($n = 6$) by organizations that have a thousand or more subscribers. These figures demonstrate the number of people who are interested in the news organizations' information. A recent US study shows an estimated quarter of adults surveyed use YouTube as a source for news (Stocking et al., 2019) via YouTube; close to 50% of Africans get their news from YouTube (Statista, n.d.). In Kenya, approximately 24% of the population uses social media, and over 9.5 million use YouTube (Kemp, 2024).

The news organizations that posted stories about infertility not only had millions of subscribers but attracted thousands to view these stories. The study shows that 70% ($n = 14$) of the stories had a thousand or more viewers. Recent studies show an increase in the number of people watching YouTube for health information and support (Mohamed & Shoufan, 2024; Naslund et al., 2014). This study also shows a relationship between the length of the story (time) and likes ($p = 0.049$) and the number of comments and likes ($p = 0.0001$), which could

indicate that longer stories and comments provided more information that viewers found interesting.

The current study shows that only 25% ($n = 5$) of the uploaded news stories explained the meaning of infertility, and none explicitly discussed the differences between primary and secondary infertility. Explaining secondary infertility is important because it is the main form affecting women in sub-Saharan Africa (Cates et al., 1985; Larsen 2000; 2003). These results are in line with studies expressing concern about the quality of health information on YouTube (Etzel et al., 2022; Kara et al., 2024; Ozsoy-Unubol & Alanbay-Yagci, 2021). Even though few videos explained infertility, 65% ($n = 13$) presented a medical expert to discuss the topic as a trusted source of information, a finding like that of Larsson et al. (2019).

For most couples, infertility is very private, yet 60% ($n = 12$) of the videos used a personal point-of-view to provide information. Some discussed stigma; many of the women featured in the stories described leaving marriages after more than a decade because they could not have children. They attested that their communities made them feel less worthy as a woman and a wife because they could not have kids. Women in Kenya and other sub-Saharan countries often feel shame when the problem of infertility

arises in marriage (Ndegwa, 2016; Donkor & Sandall, 2007; Fledderjohann, 2012). The women also discussed the financial hardship of losing their families and any wealth associated with a marriage. Studies have found that women in sub-Saharan Africa can be subjected to financial difficulties because of their reproductive health (Asiimwe et al., 2022), and the continuous medical care associated with infertility imposes financial hardship. The implication of the study is that news outlets in Kenya are discussing the importance of infertility in the country. The messages include not only health information for both women and men but also the social factors that come with an infertility diagnosis. These discussions in the media could be crucial for both improving health outcomes through providing information but also reducing stigma.

CONCLUSION

This study gives insights into conversations about infertility in the news in Kenya. In using news stories posted on YouTube, the study has some limitations. Only videos that were 20 minutes or less and posted 7 years ago were included. Some were in-studio interviews about infertility, but some seemed to be part of a segment, and if the other part did not meet the criteria, it was excluded from the analysis.

Conversations about infertility are important in all parts of the world because an estimated 1-in-6 people are diagnosed with the disease (WHO, 2024). It is especially important in sub-Saharan Africa, where rates of secondary infertility are high (Larsen, 2000). The videos analyzed in this study tried to show the human toll of infertility through personal stories of women, which is crucial to dispelling the stigma associated with this aspect of reproductive health. Researchers must continue to monitor how media organizations that have the potential to reach a large audience discuss sensitive health issues like infertility.

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