

Talking About Fertility: Awareness, Attitudes and Workplace Support in the UK

Fertility insights survey by M·E·L Research, in partnership
with Fertility Network UK

October 2025



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Introduction

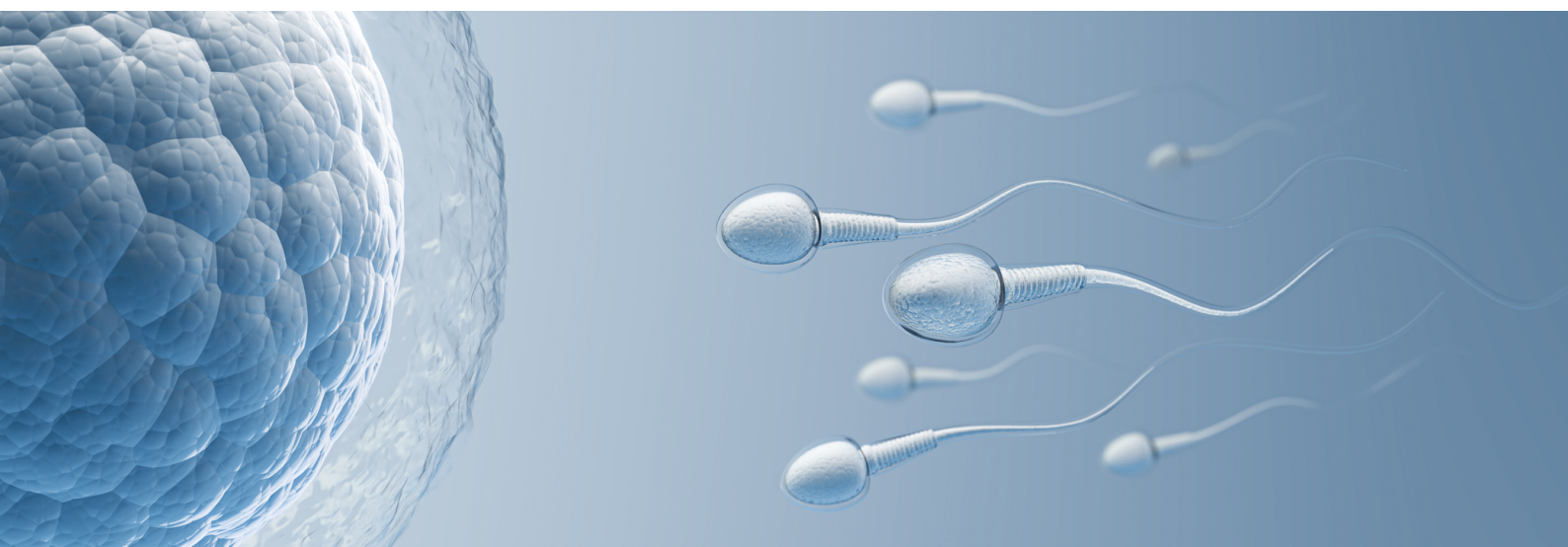
Fertility affects millions of people across the UK, yet public understanding of fertility problems and fertility treatment remains varied, and support, particularly in workplace settings, is often unclear or inconsistent.

As part of our ongoing Women's Health series, in October 2025, M·E·L Research conducted a nationally representative online survey with 1,506 adults in the UK. The survey covered awareness, understanding and attitudes towards fertility problems.

The findings highlight important gaps in public understanding, including perceptions of when fertility declines, how common fertility problems are, and the effectiveness of treatment. The research also explores levels of comfort discussing fertility and views on NHS funding and access.

In addition, the report examines how supportive UK workplaces are perceived to be for employees undergoing fertility treatment, and the extent to which the public supports measures such as paid time off, flexible working and legal protections.

This research, conducted by M·E·L Research in partnership with Fertility Network UK, provides insight into how fertility is understood in modern Britain and identifies opportunities for improved education, fairer access and stronger workplace support.



Forewords from M·E·L Research & Fertility Network UK

“Whilst one in six couples are affected by fertility problems, the topic has historically been surrounded by stigma and misunderstanding. Our research points to a positive shift in public attitudes, with growing support for more open discussion, better information, and stronger support for those undergoing fertility treatment. Creating informed, open and supportive



environments, both in society and in the workplace, is essential if we are to reduce stigma and ensure that no one faces fertility challenges in isolation. This report aims to contribute to greater awareness and meaningful debate about the future of fertility support in the UK.”

**Ruth Gosling, Associate Director and Women's Health Research Expert,
M·E·L Research**



“One in six couples are affected by fertility problems, yet fertility remains widely misunderstood, under-discussed and unevenly supported particularly in the workplace.



At Fertility Network UK, we support thousands of individuals and families every year who are navigating the emotional, physical and financial realities of fertility treatment. Behind every statistic is a deeply personal story. Too often, those stories are shaped by isolation, stigma, postcode inequalities in access to NHS funding, and uncertainty about employment rights and workplace understanding.

This research is both timely and necessary. The findings highlight encouraging shifts in public attitudes. Most people believe fertility treatment is acceptable. Many support fairer NHS access regardless of relationship status or sexual orientation. There is also clear support for flexible working and paid time off for those undergoing treatment. And yet, significant gaps remain.

These insights reinforce what we see every day that openness has improved, but progress is uneven.

This is why our Fertility in the Workplace programme exists. Employers have a vital role to play in normalising conversations, implementing practical policies, and creating compassionate cultures where employees feel safe to disclose fertility challenges without fear of disadvantage.

Fertility is a health issue. It is a workplace issue. And it is a societal issue. We hope this report sparks meaningful discussion among employers, policymakers and healthcare leaders and, most importantly, drives action.

No one should face fertility challenges alone, unsupported, or unheard.”

Sharon Martin, CEO, Fertility Network UK

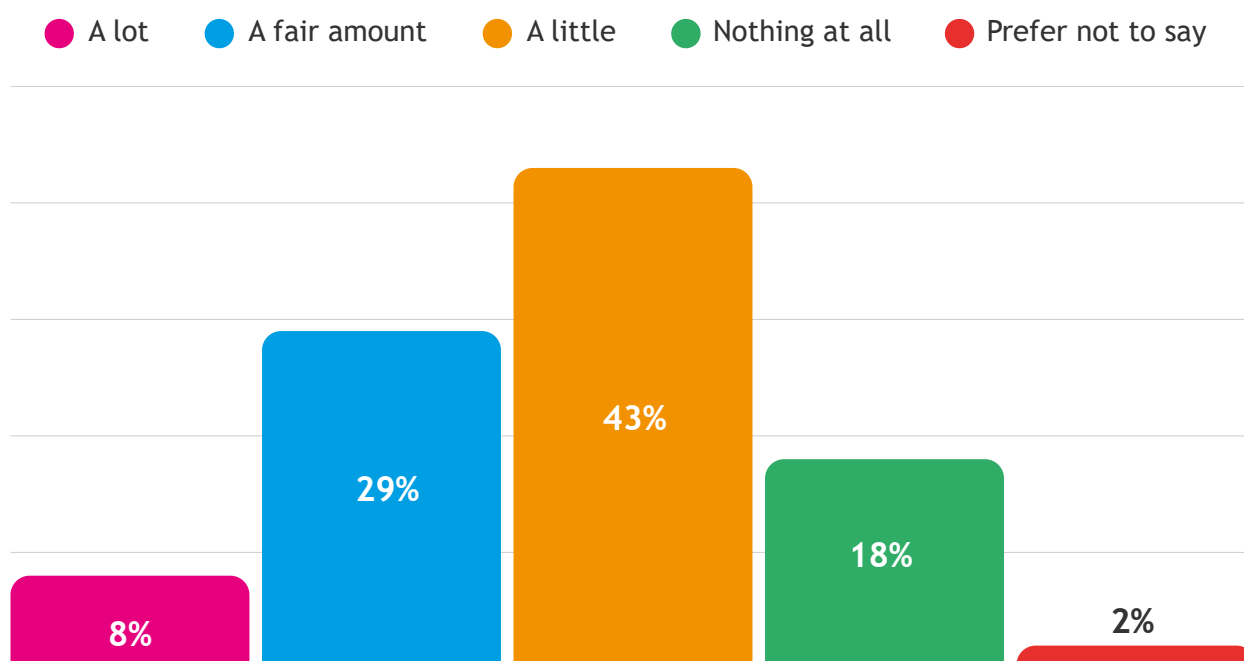
1 Low understanding of fertility problems

Just **37%** feel that they knew 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' about fertility problems, with over six in ten (**61%**) stating that they know 'a little' or 'nothing at all'.

Understanding of fertility issues is lowest among men, with one in five (**21%**) stating that they know nothing at all about it.

Understanding also declines with age, with those aged **under 35** feeling best informed. This perhaps reflects a lack of openness to discuss fertility issues in the past.

Chart: Before today, how much would you say you knew about fertility problems (i.e. difficulty conceiving, need for treatment)?



Base: all respondents (1,506)

2 Understanding of treatment options is low

Whilst nine in ten adults are aware of **IVF** (**91%**), understanding of what is involved is more limited, with one in three (**36%**) feeling they have a good understanding, compared with over half (**55%**) feeling unsure about what is involved. The picture is similar for other treatment options.

Once again, understanding around treatment options is lower amongst men, highlighting the need to break down the stigma around open discussions.

Chart: How familiar are you with each of the following types of fertility treatment?

Treatment	Very familiar	Heard of it, not sure what it involves	Not heard of it	Prefer not to say
In vitro fertilisation (IVF)	36%	55%	8%	1%
Intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI)	10%	29%	60%	1%
Intrauterine insemination (IUI)	12%	36%	50%	2%
Use of donated sperm	41%	52%	5%	2%
Use of donated eggs	40%	53%	5%	2%
Fertility preservation (e.g. oocyte cryopreservation)	30%	55%	14%	1%

Base: all respondents (1,506)

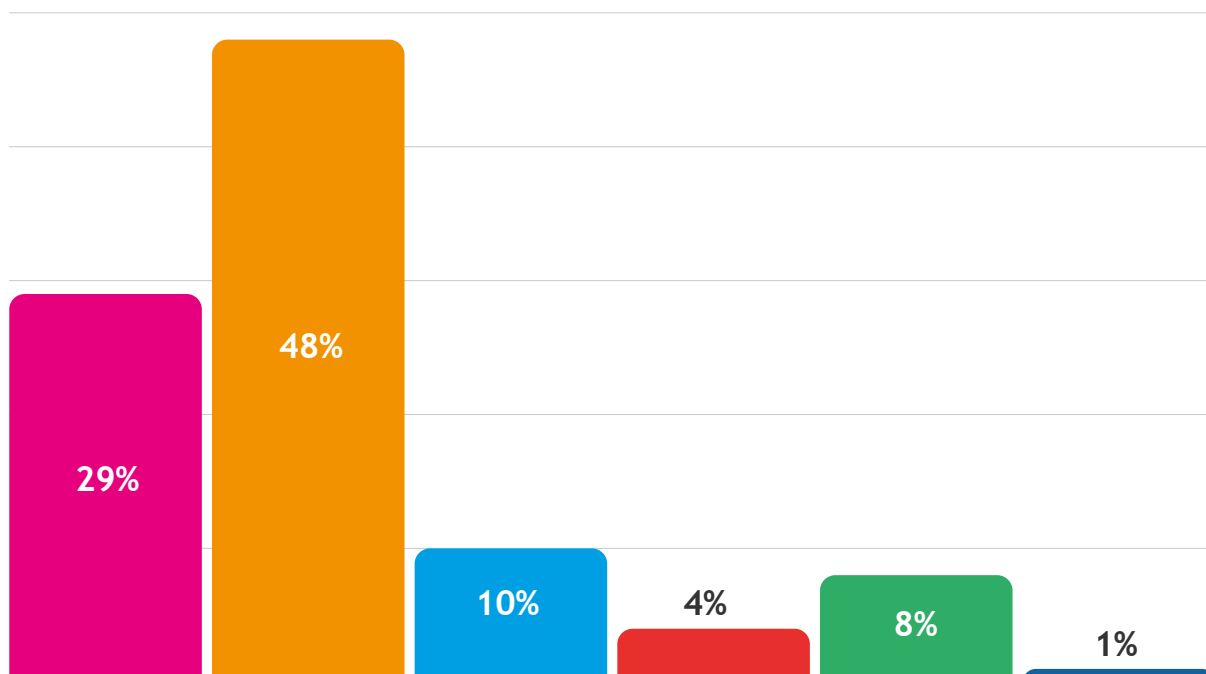
3 Stigma remains around fertility discussions for some audiences

It is encouraging that over three quarters (**77%**) feel comfortable having conversations around fertility, with just **14%** feeling uncomfortable. Again, males are less comfortable than females (**74%** vs. **80%**).

Those aged **under 25** are less comfortable having discussions around fertility (**72%**), as are those from **Asian backgrounds** (**67%**).

Chart: How comfortable do you feel personally talking about fertility?

● Very comfortable
 ● Fairly comfortable
 ● Not very comfortable
● Not at all comfortable
 ● Don't know
 ● Prefer not to say



Base: all respondents (1,506)

4 Fertility treatment is seen as acceptable, but views are divided around funding

Over eight in ten (**84%**) find the use of medical help to support conception acceptable, with just **7%** seeing it as unacceptable. Again, there is a gender divide here, with **women** finding it more acceptable than **men** (**87%** vs. **82%**). Acceptance is also lower among those from **Asian backgrounds** (**75%**).

Chart: How acceptable do you personally find the idea of using medical help (e.g. fertility drugs, IVF) to have a baby?

Responses	Male	Female	Total
Completely acceptable	48%	54%	51%
Somewhat acceptable	33%	33%	33%
Somewhat unacceptable	7%	3%	5%
Completely unacceptable	2%	2%	2%
Don't know	8%	7%	7%
Prefer not to say	2%	2%	2%

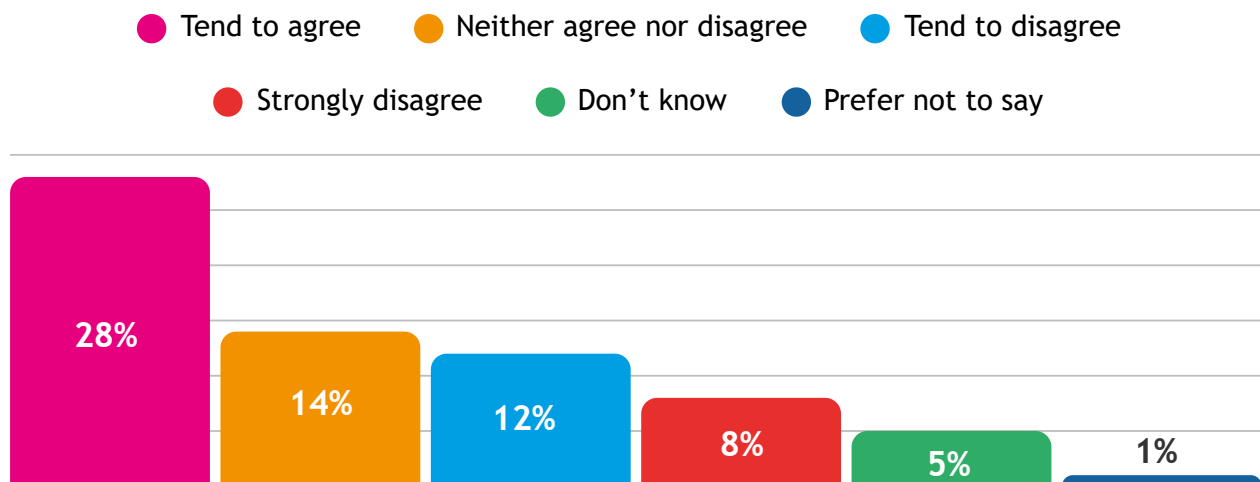
Base: all respondents (1,506)

As highlighted by Fertility Network UK, a ‘postcode lottery’ exists in relation to eligibility for funded fertility treatment. Across England, decisions are made at a local level, with **differing criteria around age, sexual orientation and relationship status**.

When asked to state their level of agreement with the statement ‘People should be able to access NHS-funded fertility treatment regardless of their relationship status or sexual orientation’, around six in ten (**59%**) agree that this should be the case, whereas one in five (**20%**) disagreed.

Support for NHS funded treatment is higher among females (**64%** vs. **54%** of males), younger people (**79%** of under 35s vs. just **37%** of over 65s), and LGBT individuals (**85%** vs. **56%** of heterosexuals).

Chart: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
“People should be able to access NHS-funded fertility treatment regardless of their relationship status or sexual orientation.”



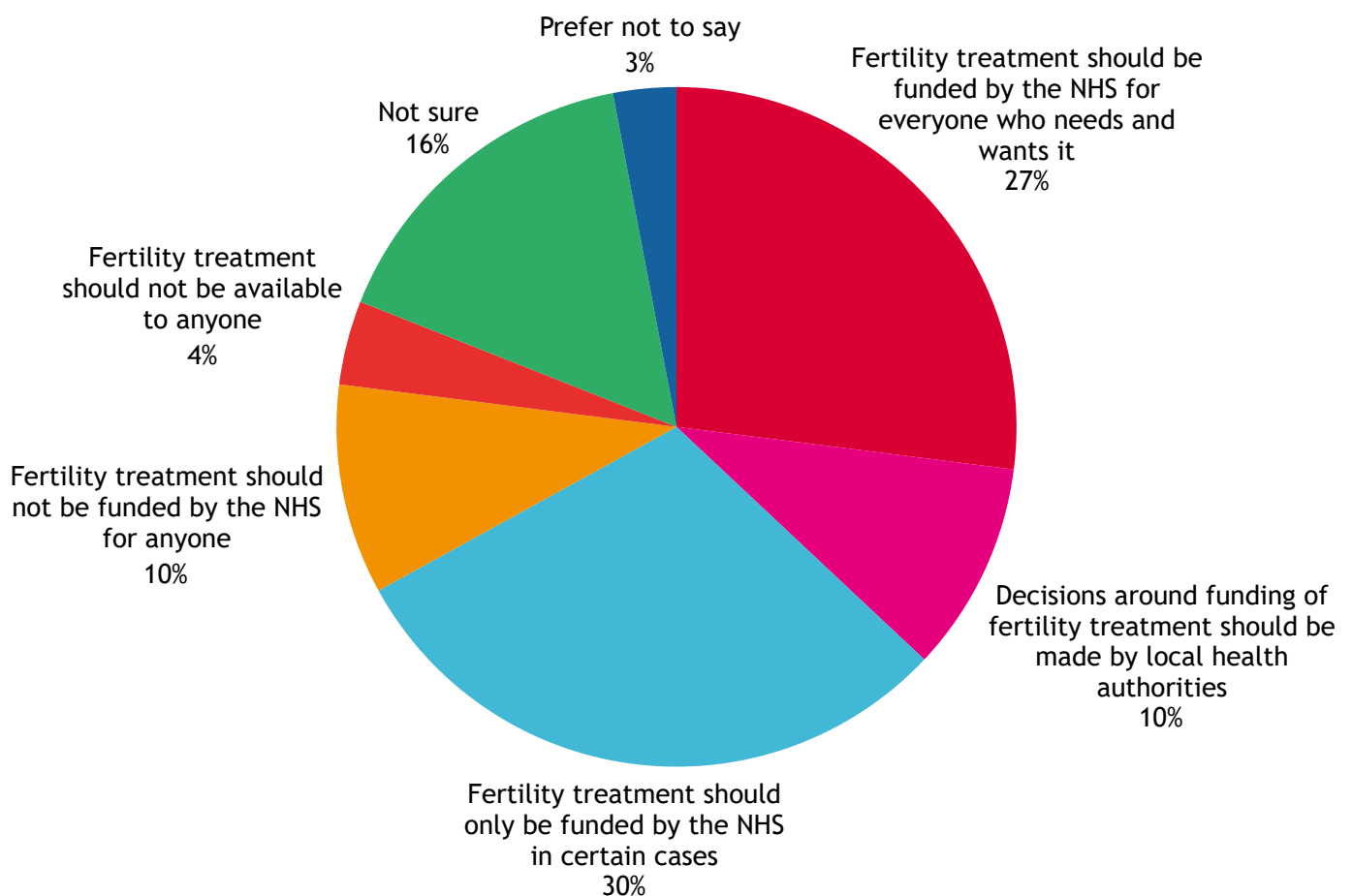
Base: all respondents (1,506)

There are a range of views around how fertility treatment should be funded in the UK:

- Around a quarter (**27%**) feel it should be funded by the NHS for all who need it
- One in ten (**10%**) feel the decision should be made by local health authorities
- Three in ten (**30%**) feel it should only be funded in certain circumstances
- One in ten (**10%**) feel it should not be funded by the NHS for anyone
- Just **4%** feel it should not be available at all.

Again, support for funded treatment is higher among **females, younger people** and **LGBT people**.

Chart: Which of the following best describes how you feel fertility treatment should be funded in the UK?



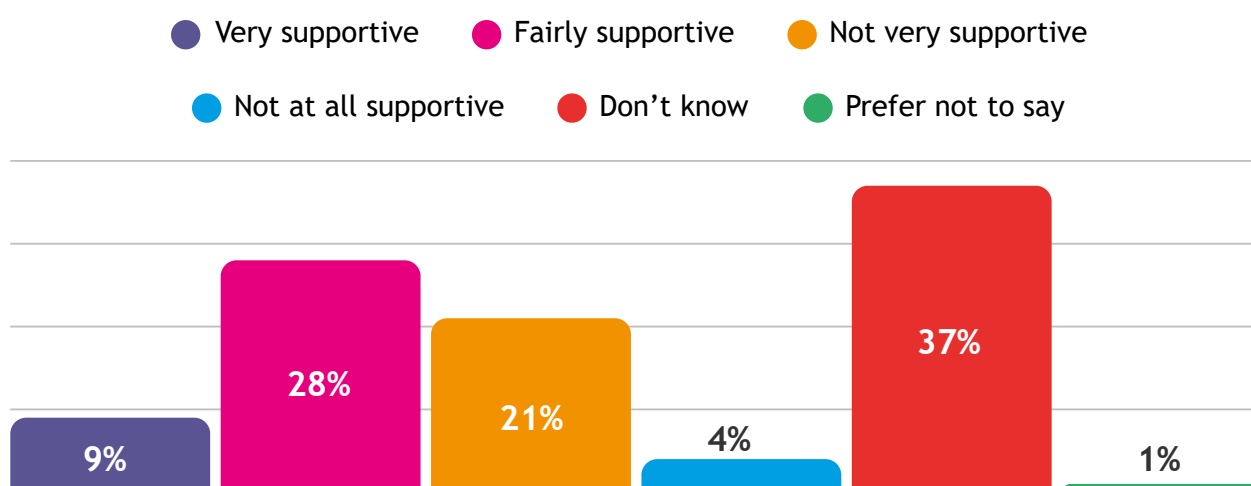
Base: all respondents (1,506)

5 Views are split on current workplace support for employees undergoing fertility treatment

We asked how supportive workplaces are of employees undergoing fertility treatment. Around one in three (37%) didn't know, perhaps reflecting a lack of personal experience of fertility issues, along with the lack of open discussion around workplace policies on fertility.

Around one in three (37%) feel that most UK workplaces are supportive, whereas one in four (25%) feel they are unsupportive. **Males** are more likely than **females** to feel that workplaces are supportive (40% vs. 35%), and **younger adults** were also more positive around support.

Chart: How supportive do you think most UK workplaces are of employees undergoing fertility treatment?

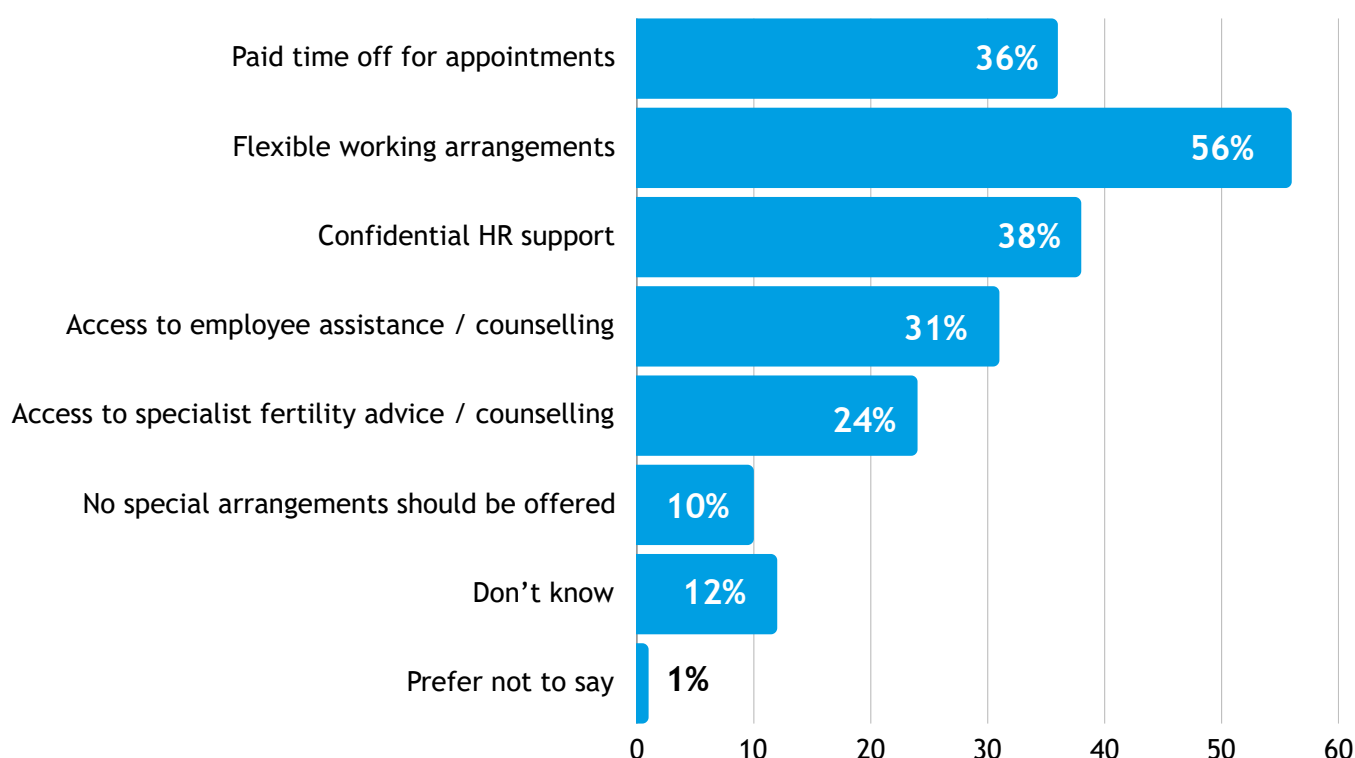


Base: all respondents (1,506)

There is strong support for flexible working arrangements for those undergoing fertility treatment (**56%**), particularly among women (**62%**). This reflects the broader societal call for greater flexibility, and highlights a potential benefit to employers in recruitment and retention of women.

Whilst support for other measures is less universal, almost four in ten favour confidential HR support (**38%**), with a similar proportion calling for paid time off for appointments (**36%**).

Chart: Which of the following do you think employers should offer staff undergoing fertility treatment? (Multiple choice)



Base: all respondents (1,506)

6 Participant Quotes

Alongside the quantitative findings, respondents were invited to share their own reflections on fertility, treatment and workplace support.

The comments below provide personal insight into lived experiences, perceived stigma and views on fairness and access. They add depth and context to the survey data, illustrating the real-world impact behind the statistics.



“Infertility is a medical condition. NHS funding would make treatment fair, reduce emotional harm, support all family types, and be cost effective long term” **Male, 25 to 34**

“In my current workplace, I'm allowed to go to midwife appointments with my wife without having to take unpaid leave so I think if people are undergoing fertility treatment they should be allowed the same provision.”
Male, 25 to 34



“I feel like it should be talked about a lot more than it is. I feel like a lot of people still see it as a taboo topic, but if it was spoken about more then people who are struggling with fertility issues would no longer feel the need to keep it to themselves.” **Female, 25 to 34**

“I had a premature menopause at age 29 so fertility issues affected me from a young age. I felt unsupported and there was a real lack of information and advice available.” **Female, 55 to 64**



Conclusion

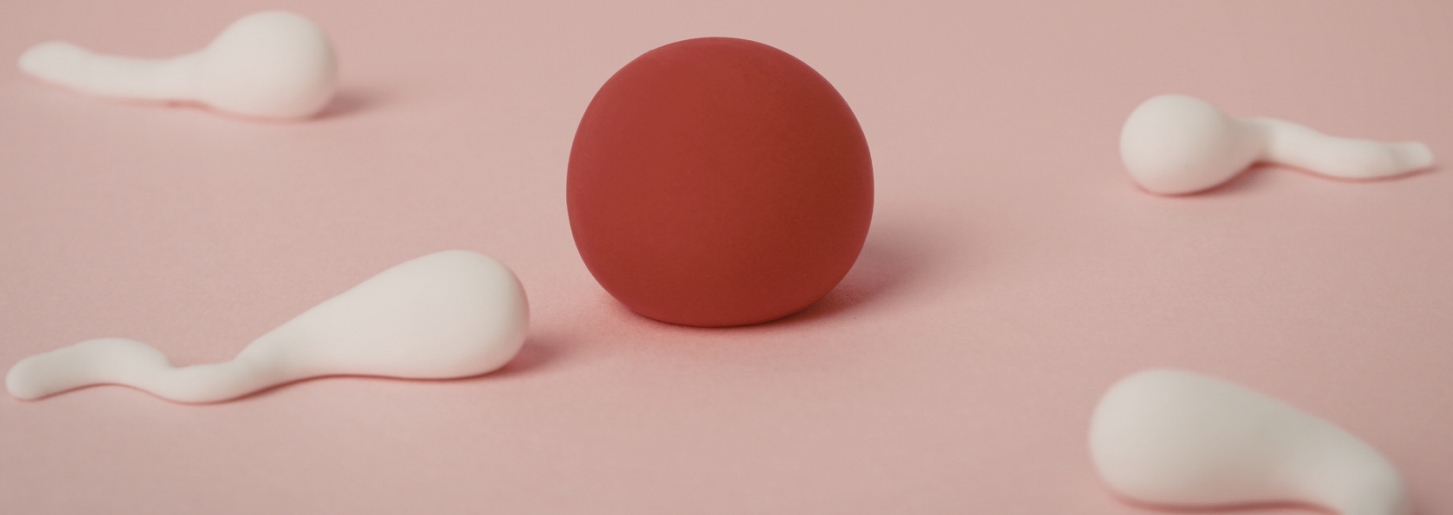
Fertility affects millions of people across the UK, yet public understanding of fertility problems and fertility treatment remains varied, and support, particularly in workplace settings, is often unclear or inconsistent.

This report presents findings from a nationally representative study conducted in October 2025, examining awareness, knowledge and attitudes toward fertility, fertility treatment and workplace support.

The findings highlight important gaps in public understanding, including perceptions of when fertility declines, how common fertility problems are, and the effectiveness of treatment. The research also explores levels of comfort discussing fertility and views on NHS funding and access.

In addition, the report examines how supportive UK workplaces are perceived to be for employees undergoing fertility treatment, and the extent to which the public supports measures such as paid time off, flexible working and legal protections.

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About Fertility Network UK

[Fertility Network UK](#) is the nation's leading patient-focused fertility charity. For over 20 years, they have supported people experiencing fertility problems, providing trusted information, emotional support and a strong, independent voice advocating for fair access to treatment across the UK.

Fertility Network UK offer free and impartial support through:

- Dedicated support line
- Online and in-person support groups
- Educational resources and events
- Advocacy for equitable NHS funding and access
- The Fertility in the Workplace programme, helping employers develop compassionate policies and inclusive cultures

They campaign to end the postcode lottery in fertility treatment and to ensure that access to NHS-funded care is fair, inclusive and based on clinical need rather than geography, relationship status or sexual orientation.

By combining lived experience with evidence and policy expertise, Fertility Network UK works to reduce stigma, improve understanding and ensure that no one navigating fertility challenges feels isolated.



About the Researchers

M·E·L Research is a UK-based, social, market and behavioural research and insights consultancy. But we aren't a standard research agency. Our vision is to make a positive difference to organisations, employees, customers, and wider society. We champion **social value** — in **why** they work, **how** they work, and **who** they work with.

M·E·L Research deliver its omnibus survey twice annually, typically around April and October. The survey is conducted with a representative sample of 1,500 adults by age and gender across the UK. The survey provides an opportunity for fresh insight into areas that are overlooked and misunderstood, such as fertility.

In the October 2025 wave, M·E·L Research partnered with Fertility Network UK, the nation's leading patient-focused fertility charity.

Need support with your own health and wellbeing social research or evaluation?

Health and wellbeing market research is a key interest of the M·E·L Research team. A rapidly growing part of our research delivery is in the intertwined fields of public health, primary and social care, and community wellbeing.

Whether you're a public body, charity or organisation looking to understand your audience, evaluate impact or inform future strategies, we're here to help you.

Get in touch with the M·E·L Research team today using the contact details on the following page to see how our expert evaluators and researchers can support your goals.

For more information about Fertility Network UK and for support visit:



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For more information about the research, contact M·E·L Research:

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