“Going somewhere makes sense, but somehow it seems more shameful:” Italian women’s attitudes and perceptions of reproductive tourism

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“GOING SOMEWHERE MAKES SENSE, BUT SOMEHOW IT SEEMS MORE SHAMEFUL:”
ITALIAN WOMEN’S ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF REPRODUCTIVE TOURISM

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PURPOSE
The purpose of this study is to understand Italian women’s perceptions of and experiences with reproductive tourism, including benefits and barriers, and emotional, mental and physical costs.

METHODS
- Semi-structured interviews with 30 women (ages 18 to 50 years)
- living in or near Florence, Italy and using the Italian healthcare system at the time of the study
- May - June 2018
- Grounded theory approach: Open and axial coding on verbatim transcriptions
- Constant comparison to identify emergent themes

TABLE 1: THEMES & SUBTHEMES

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reproductive Health Treatment</th>
<th>Social Perceptions</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>In-Country Limitations</td>
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<td>&quot;There are doctors here called conscientious objectors who deny you...even though abortion is legal here. It really puts you in a hard place because they’re exercising their right but at the same time denying you your right.&quot;</td>
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| "Restrictions for non-heterosexual couples"
  "For example, if you are a couple of two women, in Italy it is not allowed. No, because you have to have a man and a woman."
| "There are limitations in the adoption system or in the fact that you cannot adopt if you're gay..." |
| Gender Differences            | "Nobody speaks about it. You speak about it only with your very close friends or very close relatives"
| "[We hear about reproductive tourism] on TV like through the news about the fact that there is growing in Italy the search for a baby outside from the country"
| "When that problem comes up, it’s very difficult to be accepted in the old families. Unfortunately, there is still this - I think there is still this mentality a lot."
| "There is so much pressure on women... to be [a] mom. The family that has to be dad, mom. Two moms is not okay. Two dads is not okay... [and for a working woman] it’s difficult because you are always requested for more and more... on the opposite side, someone that decided not to have a baby, not to be a mom, you’re not [a] woman... we are really really really a step behind many other countries."

| Actions Cost                  | "I know it was expensive, very expensive, but I didn’t want to ask."
| "From what [people] have shared with me it’s just very expensive to have tests to understand infertility problems. I know that some of my friends just stop there, they couldn’t afford to inquire on the problem."

| Emotional Cost                | "If you don’t have the services in your own country, going somewhere makes sense. But, yeah, somehow it seems to be like more shameful, doesn’t it? To have to go somewhere and do it."
| "So if you are also to think about the trip, to be out of your home to make it, it’s more difficult. And instead if you could make it in Italy, at least you are in your home."

DISCUSSION
- Findings suggest women travel to countries, such as Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, among others, for reproductive services they cannot obtain in Italy.
- In particular, IVF, oocyte donation, sperm donation, and surrogacy are highly regulated or illegal in Italy.
- Results provide insight into the many dimensions and challenges women face receiving health care in Italy, including stress associated with travel logistics, emotional distress, and expense.
- Findings can be used to inform healthcare providers treating women with infertility who are contemplating reproductive tourism.
- Additionally, women’s narratives should be used to modify restrictive reproductive technology to better support women and families.