

THE ROLE OF INFERTILITY AS A THREATENING FACTOR OF MARRIED LIFE BASED ON INFERTILE COUPLES' STANDPOINT

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ABSTRACT

Background: Experience of infertility, which has been called crisis by some ones, is a common problem which is accompanied by physical, economic, psychological and social stress and affects all aspects of people's life. The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of infertility as a threatening factor of married life based on infertile couples' standpoint. **Method:** In this descriptive-analytical study 150 infertile couples (two groups of couples; in one group 75 infertile males and in another 75 infertile females), who were referring to Ahvaz Jihad Daneshgahi infertility treatment centers which were selected using available sampling method, were investigated. Data were gathered in face to face interviews using a researcher-made questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two parts of demographic data and infertility information. Data were analyzed

using SPSS software and Chi-square test. **Results:** The average age of men was 35 and the average age of women was 30. 7.6 percent of the men and 12.4 percent of the women looked at infertility as an end for their married life. There is a statistically significant correlation between the infertility treatment methods and considering infertility as a threat to marriage ($P=0.046$, $p = 0.002$) and those women who were infertile and had taken medicine for

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treatment thought of infertility as a threat to their married life. **Conclusion:** The results of this study, such as the results of other studies in this field, indicate that infertility effects on women more than men and women have more social and psychological problems which are needed to be addressed separately using special programs.

KEYWORDS: Infertility, Mental health, Ahvaz.

INTRODUCTION

Infertility is a meaningful word which has attracted much attention from past until now and it is defined as disability to have a child after one year continual sexual activity without using any contraception methods.^[1] Infertility has affected 10-18 percent of couples around the world so that it is estimated that 72.4 millions of couples in the world are infertile. Because of some changes in life situations such as alcohol and tobacco products consumption, the old population, stressful situations of life and obesity arising from decrease of physical activity infertility has increased.^[2] It is estimated that the amount of infertility in Iran is 9-22 percent.^[3] Infertility as a stressful factor has a big negative effect on infertile couples' life and exposes them to a lot of mental and physical problems in a way that an infertile woman thinks about herself as a disabled one and feels disappointment and an infertile man also feels that his manliness decreases. All these can endanger the base of life and couples' relationships.^[4]

The high prevalence of mental disorders in infertile women, who are under hard and laborious treatments, long-term waiting periods, feeling loneliness and being rejected and their fear of failure in treatment make them show high levels of anxiety and physical symptoms and therefore they become impatient. The stress arising from infertility along with direct and indirect effects of matrimony factors decreases efficiency and sincerity and has more negative effects on the quality of women's life than the quality of their husbands'.

Veehak and colleagues believe that the infertility issue consists of physical and mental aspects. Infertile couples experience stressful mental aspects. For most of these couples, an unsuccessful In vitro fertilization (IVF) or sperm injection to cytoplasmic space equals the end of medical treatment.^[6] On the other hand, the study of Repokari and colleagues points out that the stages of infertility treatment can not be dangerous for marital compatibility and even distribution of the stress of infertility to couples can reinforce their matrimony relationship.

A study also showed that in spite of lower level of sexual satisfaction, matrimony and self-confidence among infertile couples, increasing the social support decreases the negative effects of infertility.^[8] Researchers have various ideas about the effect of infertility on couple's relationships. Many studies have stated that there is no significant document to prove the negative mental effect of infertility.^[9] Even some believe that couple's patience in diagnosis stages and infertility treatment increases relationship and sincerity among couples and they feel more nearness to each other.^[10]

Psychological-social support of infertile couples during infertility treatments has an effect on the infertility treatment process and leads to positive relationship between couples. Therefore, due to all mentioned issues and this matter that infertility is a hard and chronic disease, the role of infertility as a threatening factor for married life among infertile couples has been less considered and the results of such studies can be effective in improving relations between infertile couples. This study aimed to determine the effect of infertility as a threatening factor of married life based on infertile couples' standpoint who were referring to infertility treatment center in Ahvaz.

METHOD

In this descriptive-analytical study, 150 infertile couples (two groups of couples; in one group 75 infertile males and in another 75 infertile females), who were referring to Ahvaz Jihad Daneshgahi infertility treatment centers, were investigated. The couples were selected using simple sampling method were infertile for at least one year and literate and maximum age for men was 55 and for women was 45 women. The instrument used was questionnaire, which consists of two parts: 1. Demographic information form which contains background variables including age, sex, economic status, education level, age of marriage and marital satisfaction. 2. The infertility information form including infertility factor, the cause of infertility, duration of infertility, infertility treatment, their type and number to treat infertility and infertility history in a family. To provide a scientific validity of the demographic information questionnaire, content validity was used. The questionnaire was provided after studying the latest books and articles and then was given to 10 members of the Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery to be studied and modified and after making the necessary corrections based on their opinions, the final version was drafted. After completing the questionnaire by 20 samples, the results were analyzed by a statistician and its correlation coefficient using Cronbach's alpha test 92% was obtained. Data was collected using research tools and

questionnaires were filled with regard to the privacy of the subjects. In terms of gender, the questioner was of the same age with the subjects which is one of the necessary conditions of the work. The researcher, in accordance with the privacy, after self-introduction, provided some explanation about the subject, purposes and importance of the study and research units were made sure that the information would be kept secret. Then the written consent letter for inclusion to the study was taken and each of the spouses was guided to separate rooms, which had been considered for this issue, and then the questionnaire was completed with an interview. Because the spouses were interviewed separately, they were not aware of the responses of each other.

Data was coded and entered into a computer, and was analyzed with statistical software SPSS (version 21). Descriptive statistics and Chi-square test was used and A significant level was considered less than 0.05.

RESULTS

In this research, men were at least 23 years old and at most 60 years old and women were at least 19 years old and at most 46 years old. More women were housewife and their husbands were self-employed.

The results of this study showed that 37.3 percent of women had more than a five-year history of infertility and 31.7 percent of them had less than two-year history of infertility.

In terms of treatment methods, 31.2 percent had used IUI, 14.8 percent IVF and 54 percent had used just medicine.

Based on infertile men and women' opinion, there was no significant relationship between the number of treatment failure and the history of infertility in the first-level relatives or family and considering the infertility as a threatening factor for married life. And also 73.3 percent of couples who considered infertility as a threatening factor for married life had been under infertility treatment and 26.7 percent of them had not received any treatment. The results showed that 53.5 percent of men and 61.9 percent of women who had more than five years infertility considered infertility as a defect in themselves. And 39.4 percent of infertile men and 40.3 percent of infertile women considered this issue as a defect in their husbands. Wives of 35.9 percent of the infertile men and husbands of 32.4 percent of the infertile women considered this issue as a defect in their spouse. And the wives of 22.7 percent of the

men and the husbands of 9.1 percent of the women considered the infertility issue, which did not exist in their spouses, as a threat for married life. 7.6 percent of men and 12.4 percent of women considered infertility as an end of matrimony line.

Finally, 9.7 percent of infertile men and 7.6 percent of infertile women were thinking about divorce and remarriage. And it is interesting that 10.4 percent of the infertile men and women because of their mental problems had been under mental treatment.

In this research, demographic results, which are shown in the Table 1, showed that there was no statistically significant relationship between none of the demographic characteristics and the question of the researcher-made questionnaire “do you consider infertility as a threat for your married life” ($P>0.05$).

The results which are related to relationship between contraception methods and considering married life as a threat have stated in the Table 2.

According to obtained information from Table 2, based on women’s standpoint, infertility is a threat for a married life and the difference between men and women was meaningful ($p=0.002$) using Chi-square test (liner-by-liner Association) and indicates that based on women’s standpoint -who took just medicine- this issue was meaningful.

Results obtained from the relationship between infertility factor and considering it as a threat for married life have been provided in Table 3. According to obtained information, women consider infertility as a threatening factor for married life. Based on the obtained results using Chi-square test (liner-by-liner Association) ($P=0.046$), there was no any significant difference between two groups of men and women and it was shown that this issue to women is a threatening factor for married life.

Table1: Demographic characteristics of infertile couples differentiated by gender (Table 1)

Groups		variable	Women Number (percent)	men Number (percent)
		Age	30.7 (5.7)	35.4 (6.5)
Occupation		Housewife	127(84.7)	-
		Clerk	15(10)	44(29.3)
		Free	5(3.3)	63(42)
		Worker	2(1.3)	37(24.7)
		Retired	1(0.7)	4(2.7)
		Unemployed	-	2(1.4)
Education		Elementary	15(10)	7(4.7)
		Guidance	26(17.3)	31(20.7)
		High school	14(9.3)	13(8.7)
		Diploma	59(39.3)	54(36)
		Advance	36(24)	45(30)
Economic status		Weak	52(17.3)	52(17.3)
		Moderate	184(61.3)	184(61.3)
		Good	64(21.3)	64(21.3)
		Excellent	-	-
Housing status		Personal	158(52.7)	158(52.7)
		Leased	142(47.3)	142(47.3)
Marriage age		Mean (StandardDeviation)	23.42(6.23)	28.06(6.71)
Duration of marriage		Mean (Standard Deviation)	7.15(4.31)	7.04(4.29)
Age difference between spouses		Less than 5 years	159(53)	159(53)
		Between 5 and 10 years	106(35.3)	106(35.3)
		More than 10 years	26(8.7)	26(8.7)
		Reverse age difference	9(3)	9(3)
Marriage type		Permanent	148(98.7)	148(98.7)
		Second	2(1.3)	2(1.3)
		Temporary	-	-

Table 2: Relationship between methods of infertility treatment methods and considering infertility as a threat of married life (Table 2)

Marriage treating the factor of study Variables		Yes	No	P value
Doing the treatment	Yes	65 (73.31%)	182 (82%)	0.107
	No	20 (26.7%)	40 (18%)	
Method of treatment	IUI	12 (19.7%)	65 (34.8%)	0.026
	IVF	7 (11.5%)	30 (16%)	
	Just medicine	42 (68.9%)	92 (49.2%)	
Infertility Factor	Man	33 (44%)	117 (52.7%)	0.192
	Woman	42 (65%)	105 (47.3%)	
The history of Infertility	Yes	16 (21.3%)	37 (16.7%)	0.37
	No	59 (78.7%)	184 (83.3%)	

DISCUSSION

According to the results of this study, it was found that there was no significant relationship between demographic characteristics and this question of the researcher-made questionnaire: "Do you consider infertility as a threat to your married life." In this regard, the study of Faal Kalkhouran and colleagues showed that education had no significant effect on anxiety and marital satisfaction. Cultural background is an important factor in attitudes toward infertility and the amount of fertility in each culture has a significant effect on people's marital consent and psychological states which can neutralize the effect of education. And also tendency to have children is an instinctive desire and it is less affected with the level of education which is consistent with the results of our study.^[11]

Infertility has different effects on various aspects of infertile people's life. The pressure of infertility on women was heavier and leads to more severe emotional and social consequences in women than men which can have many reasons including that psychologically and physiologically, pregnancy and labor is considered as a need for a woman and pregnancy is a manifestation of her self-actualization and identity. Almost all societies and cultures give great value to pregnancy and consider it as the most important aim of marriage.^[12] In our society, infertility is also considered as a stigma and paying attention to this issue that an infertile person can not follow the process of a natural reproduction like other normal people increases its importance and makes infertility a mental-social crises.^[11] On one hand, infertility problem and on the other hand, the problems resulting from the treatment and lead to their anxiety and somatic disorders and disturb the social function. According to obtained results of this study, those women who were infertile, considered it as a threat for their marital life which can be because of women's economic dependency because most of them were housewife. On the other hand, playing the role of a mother is considered as the most important satisfying source for women while if a man because of any reason, does not become successful in playing his family roles, he has other sources for satisfying himself and he is able to compensate his failure in fertility through playing job and social roles.^[13] Women who were infertile compared to women whose husbands were infertile factor have experienced more problems with their self-confidence and also feel guilty and shameful.^[14]

Valsangr study revealed that infertility has different effects on various aspects of life of infertile people. Infertility pressure on women is heavier and causing severe emotional and social outcomes than men that is not follows our study.^[15]

Infertility is considered a stigma in our society due to the fact that infertile men naturally and Like other normal people cannot follow the process of reproduction and infertility adds to its significance to a psychosocial crisis converts.^[11] Infertility problems on the one hand, the problems resulting from the treatment of other anxiety disorders in their physical and social work disrupt.^[16] Women with infertility of women compared to women with male infertility factor have more problems in confidence and a sense of guilt and shame.^[17]

Bruce's study and colleagues showed that infertility whose cause is a man does not have any negative effect on marital relationship. And also the infertile men show more marital consent than their wives.^[18] Pointlessness in the married life of infertile couples has a gradual process and it can lead to an end for their relationship. It means that finally couples understand that in spite of their frequent attempts, this relationship does not make their life meaningful.^[19]

This study showed that there is a significant difference between infertility treatment methods and this issue that infertility can be a threatening factor for the marital life. So that those people who reach to IVF, consider this factor as a threat for marital life and a group who receives just medicine, consider infertility as a factor to disturb the marital life. And this issue perhaps is because of this reason that these people have got aware of infertility statues recently and had no hope for fertility and saw themselves in a deal-end because of not getting the other methods in their married life. But IVF method, in spite of its failures, is found as an absolute factor to treat infertility among people. Therefore, those people who reach to this method spent more marital years with each other, they get familiar with each other's characteristics and they have more compatibility and on the other hand, they are much hopeful toward this treatment method. Hence, infertility is not considered as a threatening factor by them which is consistent with Kalkhouran's and colleagues.

Perhaps today, assisted reproductive technology and significant advances in infertility field have increased hope in people and on the other hand, sharing stress arising from infertility with couples and time lapse which help them to cope with the infertility and have helped infertile people have less problems in their marital relationship.^[20]

Verhaak and colleagues believe that the issue of infertility, including physical and mental aspects. Infertile couples have experienced more psychological stressful aspects. For most couples, unsuccessful in vitro fertilization or sperm is injected into the cytoplasm to ends the end of medical treatment.^[21]

The Repokari's study and colleagues also point out that the infertility treatment stages can not be a danger for marital compatibility and dividing stress among couples can even reinforce marital relationship.^[2]

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