

Perceptions, Experiences and Emotional Supports for Male Infertility, a review

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Abstract

Although male-factor infertility accounts for approximately 45% of all infertility problems (1), there is a lack in the literature in the interdisciplinary aspect of men's perceptions of their diagnosis of infertility and the types of social outlets they have available to them to help them understand and live a successful life with this diagnosis. We therefore conducted a preliminary meta-analysis to characterize types of emotional supports used by men diagnosed with infertility had access to, as well as their perceptions and emotions related to infertility. We used a specific set of inclusion and exclusion criteria to determine what studies would be included in the review. It was clear from the search that there is not nearly as much support for those with male infertility in North America as there is in the UK. Similarly, there appears to be a lot more access for women suffering from infertility than there is for males.

Purpose

To review and document the published literature on the perceptions, experiences and supports available to men diagnosed with infertility.

Introduction

- An estimated 14% of married couples are infertile in Canada, the United States, Denmark, Scotland and Switzerland (2)
- Reason for infertility is a male or female fertility issue in 30-35% of all cases, 20% of cases is attributable to both partners, 10% is unexplained (1)
- Male infertility accounts for 45% of all cases of infertility (1). 50-60% of those who are diagnosed will continue to bear a child (1)
- The research and technology available to help those diagnosed with infertility bear a child is much more comfortable dealing with the woman's body, whether it be male or female-factor infertility (3)
- The experiences and perceptions of women diagnosed with infertility is well documented in the literature. However, the perceptions, experiences and support outlets available to men diagnosed with infertility is unrepresented (1)

Preliminary Causes of Male Infertility (4)

- Genetic/Congenital
- Infectious
- Unexplained
- Varicocele
- Oligospermia
- Azoospermia

Study Design

Methodology

- Meta-analysis
- Interdisciplinary approach
- Database:
 - Pubmed
 - Scopus
- Search terms:
 - Human
 - Male/men
 - Infertility
 - Perceptions
 - Experiences
 - Emotions
 - Formal supports
 - Support
 - Gender
 - Masculinity

Inclusion Criteria

- Year
 - 1990 – 2012
- Setting
 - USA
 - Canada
- Language
 - English
- Study design
 - Interviews
 - Surveys
 - Focus groups
 - Meta-analysis

Exclusion Criteria

- Full article unavailable
- Studies with animals
- Clinical biological studies
- Review papers
- Setting outside of inclusion criteria
- Language: Non-English
- Date of study outside of inclusion criteria

Preliminary Findings

- Emotional experiences include grief, loss, isolation, personal inadequacy, loss of control (5)
- Infertile men report lower sexual and personal quality of life (7)
- Infertile men have difficulty discussing fertility concerns with friends and family and avoid social situations (7)
- Men are less open about male-factor infertility than female factor infertility (8)
- The greater the social support and reciprocity, the lower the feelings of loneliness for infertile men (9)
- Men are less likely to join support groups for infertility than women (11)
- Men have a greater marital adjustment with the acceptance of the inability to have a child than women (12)
- Sexual stress among infertile men may be because of performance anxiety rather than a lessened sexual satisfaction associated with infertility (14)

Results

Citation	Author	Year	Setting	Design	Sample	Database	Major Findings	Reference
The End of the Line: Infertile Men's Experiences of Being Unable to Produce a Child	Russell Webb. Judith Daniluk	Jul-99	University of British Columbia	In-depth Interviews	Six white, Euro-American men	Scopus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Seven themes that were seen in common in in-depth interviews with six men. The themes are not isolated, but rather intertwining <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Sense of profound grief and loss 2.Sense of powerlessness and loss of control 3.Sense of personal inadequacy 4.Sense of betrayal and isolation 5.Sense of threat and foreboding 6.Desire to overcome and survive 7.Need to positively reconstruct their experiences 	5
Infertility services reported by men in the United States: national survey data	John Anderson. Sherry Farr. Denise Jamieson. Lee Warner. Maurizio Macaluso	Jun-09	United States	Survey of men 15-44	4109 sexually experienced men aged 15-44	Scopus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The percentage of men seeking help appears to lower than the percentage of women (7.5% versus 13.4%) based on the comparison with another study previously done (however, the questions asked were different) •Approximately 1 in 5 of those seeking help had male-related infertility conditions. 75% of these problems were for "sperm or semen problems" and one third "varicocele" 	6
Sexual, marital, and social impact of a man's perceived infertility diagnosis	Smith JF. Walsh TJ. Shindel AW. Turek PJ. Wing H. Pasch L. Katz PP.	Sep-09	United States	Cross-sectional analysis	357 men	Pubmed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Men who perceive isolated male factor infertility have a lower sexual and personal quality of life in comparison with those men without perceived male factor infertility •Those couples who do not have a clear reason for infertility experience the highest social strain. The men have difficulty discussing fertility concerns with friends and family, experience difficulty with others understanding their concerns, and avoid social situations •Men who perceive isolated male factory infertility feel less in control of their lives, less able to meet their goals, and more personally responsible for their inability to have a child •Those couples experiencing fertility problems have increased emotional, marital and physical stress over time 	7
Perception of diagnosis and openness of patients about infertility	van Balen F. Trimbos-Kemper T. Verdurmen J.	Aug-96		Questionnaire	108 couples	Pubmed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The perception of diagnosis was different from the medical diagnosis in 38% of the cases •Patients perceived the diagnosis of male infertility more often, and the diagnosis of female infertility less often, than those that were made •There is a tendency to blame the reason for infertility on oneself •Almost always are friends and family informed of the diagnosis of infertility. 60% of the cases were open to colleagues and acquaintances, and 40% of the cases to neighbours. The response to this openness is positive •Men are less open about male-factor infertility than female factor infertility 	8
Loneliness and social support in infertile couples	Jirka J. Schuett S. Foxall MJ	Jan-96	USA	Comparative descriptive	62 couples	Pubmed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Although men and women differed in perceived loneliness, they had similar perceptions of their available social support. The greater the social support and reciprocity, the lower the feelings of loneliness for both male and female •Women who perceived conflict in their social relationships felt more lonely 	9
The effects of gender-specific diagnosis on men's and women's response to infertility	Nachtigall RD. Becker G. Wozny M.	Jan-92	USA	Structured interviews		36Pubmed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The emotional response to a diagnosis of infertility is greatly influenced by a gender-specific diagnosis. Men's response to infertility is close to the women's response if there is a male-factor diagnosis of infertility. However, if a male-factor diagnosis has not been determined, men differ from women in their response to infertility 	10
Infertile couples' perceptions of infertility support-group participation	Lentner E. Glazer G.	July 1991		Questionnaire	16 men 22 women	Pubmed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Fewer men than women wanted to join a support group, however both groups perceived similar amounts of benefit •The length of a membership with the support group and the frequency of attendance both showed a positive correlation with amount of benefit perceived 	11
Involuntary childlessness and marital adjustment: his and hers	Ulbrich PM. Coyle AT. Llabre MM.	Fall 1990	USA		103 couples	Pubmed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Both wives and husbands perceive their marital adjustment to the diagnosis of infertility in similar ways, but arrive at their views by different routes •Men have a greater marital adjustment with the acceptance of the inability to have a child •The greater the stress of infertility, the greater the marital adjustment for both wives and husbands •Men adjust better to the diagnosis of infertility if their wives are employed or have high earnings •The wives marital adjustment lessens with the length of the marriage and the course of treatment chosen for infertility •The stress women undergo as a result of infertility influences their perception of the marriage and may undermine their ability to get the support 	12
Investigating quality of life and health-related quality of life in infertility: a systematic review	Chachamovich JR. Chachamovich E. Ezer H. Fleck MP. Knauth D. Passos EP.	Jun-10	Canada	Systematic review		Pubmed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The quality of life and health-related quality of life is not as impacted by the diagnosis of infertility with men as with women 	13
Anxiety and sexual stress in men and women undergoing infertility treatment	Peterson BD. Newton CR. Feingold T.	Oct-07	USA	Prospective study	306 women. 295 men	Pubmed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •There is a stronger similarity in how men and women experience anxiety and sexual infertility stress •Men tend to report less sexual stress and less anxiety •Sexual stress among infertile men may be because of performance anxiety rather than a lessened sexual satisfaction associated with infertility 	14
Male infertility: the element of disguise	Sherrod RA	Oct-06	USA	Secondary analysis of data from a previous study	10 men	Pubmed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •There are three categories of disguise in the infertility experience of men: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Disguise to protect themselves 2.Disguise to protect their partner 3.Disguise to protect both themselves and their partner 	15
Support from health care providers and the psychological adjustment of individuals experiencing infertility	Brucker PS. McKenry PC.	Sep-04	USA	Survey research using confidential self-administered questionnaires		120Pubmed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For men, greater levels of perceived support from health care providers predicted lower levels of stress and anxiety, however it had no impact on depression 	16

References

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