

INFERTILITY AND FIRST IVF TREATMENT

- Emotional experiences of men and women -

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av

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I. First IVF treatment – short-term impact on psychological well-being and the marital relationship.

Holter H, Anderheim L, Bergh C and Möller A.
Human Reproduction Vol.21, No.12 pp. 3295-3302, 2006.

II. The psychological influence of gender infertility diagnoses among men about to start IVF or ICSI treatment using their own sperm.

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ABSTRACT

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Infertility and first IVF treatment - Emotional experiences of men and women.

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The aim of this study was to assess infertile couples' short-term emotional responses to their first IVF or ICSI treatment, their experiences of the marital relationship at different stages of the first treatment, and the psychological influence of gender infertility diagnoses among men in couples about to start their first treatment.

These two studies are part of a prospective, longitudinal study carried out during 1999-2002 at the Reproductive Medicine Unit, Sahlgrenska University Hospital.

Our first study included 117 couples (paper I), and the second included sixty-five men with male infertility diagnosis and 101 men in couples with female, mixed and unexplained infertility diagnoses (paper II). The men and women answered questionnaires separately without communicating with their partner on three occasions: the first some weeks prior to the first treatment at the information meeting, the second one hour before oocyte retrieval and the third two weeks after the pregnancy test. The questionnaires consisted of questions regarding the personal domain, relationship with the partner, and the social domain related to infertility and treatment with items concerning background factors, psychological well-being, ideal and real-life situations, optimism versus pessimism, intensity of the desire for a child, meaning of reproduction, relationship with the partner, emotional support, the influence of family and friends' attitudes toward childlessness, psychological effects of infertility and psychological effects of treatment.

It was found that women's and men's emotional reactions to the first IVF treatment were dependent on whether or not they achieved a pregnancy. Those who failed to become pregnant rated their emotional well-being as worse, whereas those who became pregnant rated their emotional well-being as better than before treatment started. The women reported stronger emotional reactions about their infertility than their husbands. The men, however, reacted with the same emotional pattern as their wives when pregnancy was not achieved.

A majority reported that the marital relationship improved during treatment.

We found no indication that male infertility influenced men negatively, as compared with men where the infertility was of female origin, concerning the experience of infertility, view of life, relationships and psychological well-being. We found that men with a male infertility diagnosis reacted in a similar way as men in couples where the diagnosis was female, mixed or unexplained infertility at the time of the first IVF/ICSI treatment cycle.

The findings in this study suggest that couples undergoing their first IVF treatment as a group are well adjusted and manage to handle the short-term emotional strain under treatment.

Men are generally well adjusted before starting their first infertility treatment, independently of which partner has the infertility diagnosis.

The determining factor for short-term emotional response to treatment was whether or not pregnancy was achieved.

Key words: infertility/ in vitro fertilization/emotional reactions/psychological well-being/marital relationship/ male factor/men/IVF/ICSI/

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