



Assisted reproductive technology cycles impact on couples’ wellbeing and sexuality
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Introduction:

Infertility treatments and the assisted reproductive technology (ART) process can be a traumatizing experience for couples. Their wellbeing, quality of life and sexuality can be negatively affected. The aim of our study was to evaluate the impact on couple wellbeing and sexual function in heterosexual patients undergoing an ART process.

Methods:

The study was conducted in a Tunisian ART center, over a period of two months. It included married heterosexual couples who were undergoing an ART cycle. Information were collected through a questionnaire they agreed to answer.

Results:

Fifty couples were included in our study. The duration of infertility was superior to twelve months in 84% of the cases. Most patients (80%) declared having a significant impact on their couple life. The marital impairments were dominated by irritability and frustration towards the partner in 62% of the cases. The feeling of injustice was triggered in 40% of the couples. Half of them reported having recurring conflicts and 30% of them had a low marital satisfaction. Two patients declared they wanted divorce. A sexual dysfunction was present in 48% of the cases. Absence of sexual intercourse for several weeks was reported in 28% of the couples. Among men, 10% had an erectile dysfunction and 12% had a low sexual desire. The prevalence of sexual impairment was higher among the women included in our study (32%). Decreased arousal was present in 14% of them and 10% declared having lubrication problems. Dyspareunia was also reported in 16% of the female population.

Discussion:

In addition to the stigma around childless couples, ART treatment represents an additional burden for couples. Various psychological disorders were reported in our study and in literature [1]. They include depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Frustration and pressure to conceive are frequently reported by partners. Therefore, they often suffer from stress division and marital instability [2]. On the other hand, couples also report impairment in their sexual life. In women, it is dominated by hypoactive sexual desire, anorgasmia, troubles with lubrication and low sexual satisfaction [3]. Men report having a decreased self-esteem and sexual performance and erectile dysfunction [4]. These impairments make the marital dysfunction even worse and make partners more distant. Many of them report not having a sexual intercourse for several weeks [5]. Finally, the repeated ART cycles and especially successive failures can lead to separation and divorce when the psychological distress becomes unbearable.

Conclusions:

The desire for children can be essential for the couple’s wellbeing and sexuality. Therefore, infertility can lead to serious dysfunctions, which can be intensified by diagnosis procedures and ART cycles. This negative impact was demonstrated in our study. Further research are however needed to identify the predictive factors of this distress.

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