Partner support during pregnancy after Assisted Reproductive Technology

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Pregnancy via Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART)

- struggle to conceive: medical tests and treatments
- repercussions of infertility and its treatment: self-esteem, stress, depression, social status, loss of control
- paradoxical situation: treatment can get around infertility but not cure it
Pregnancy via Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART)

- more obstetrical complications
- more anxiety about losing the pregnancy and about the health and survival of the future baby
- no difference for depression, higher attachment to the fetus

→ more complex experience of pregnancy

McMahon et al., 2011; Gameiro et al., 2010; Hjelmstedt et al., 2003; 2004 McMahon et al., 1997; Repokari et al., 2005; Darwiche et al., 2014
Background (3)

Prenatal screening

- potentially stress-inducing situation
- after infertility: anxiety may be higher
- partner support
  - during infertility: reduces infertility-related stress
  - after spontaneous pregnancy: lowers maternal and infant distress and is a protective factor for postpartum outcomes

Sahin & Gungor, 2007; Lippman, 1991; Kowalcek, 2007; Martins et al., 2014; Rini et al., 2006; Pilkington et al., 2016
Objective

1. Mutual support when facing a stressor
2. Impact on anxiety and depression levels

stressor = first trimester screening

12 weeks  14 weeks  22 weeks

Kowalcek, 2007; Martins et al., 2014; Tronick & Reck, 2009; Figueiredo & Costa, 2009
Research questions

1. Partner support
   - Couples with Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART)
   - Couples with Spontaneous Conception (SC)

2. Receiving support = buffer against anxiety and depression?

Kowalcek, 2007; Martins et al., 2014; Tronick & Reck, 2009; Figueiredo & Costa, 2009
Population

- Sample: 103 couples
  - 52 ART
  - 51 SC
- Age:
  - ART partners (31-42)
  - SC partners (28-37)
- Years of cohabitation: ART (4-6) and SC (1-5)
- Marriage: ART (78.5%) and SC (42.3%)
- Years of infertility treatments: M = 2.9 (SD = 2.2)

Source of infertility

- 39.20% male
- 17.60% female
- 25.50% undetermined
- 17.70% mixed
- 17.00% undetermined
Study design

T1

- Dyadic coping (DCI)
  Bodenmann, 2008
- Anxiety (STAI)
  Spielberger, 1983
- Depression (EPDS)
  Cox et al., 1987

Prenatal screening have now been completed

T2

Questionnaires

14 weeks

stressor = first trimester screening

T3

Questionnaires

22 weeks
Partner support

Dyadic Coping Inventory

Subscale 1: Perceived support provided to the other partner
What I do when my partner is stressed?
⇒ I show empathy and understanding.

Subscale 2: Perceived support received from the other partner
What does my partner do when I am stressed?
⇒ My partner shows empathy and understanding.
Partner support (DCI) Comparable to control population

Anxiety (STAI) < clinical cut-off of 40

Depression (EPDS) < clinical cut-off of 15
Support provided by men

Support received by women

Linear mixed model
Support provided by women

Support received by men
Women’s perception of received support: effect on their anxiety

Women's anxiety
- Low
- Medium
- High

Men's anxiety
- Low partner support
- Medium partner support
- High partner support

SC
- Low
- Medium
- High

ART
- Low partner support
- Medium partner support
- High partner support

T1, T2, T3
Women’s perception of received support: effect on their depression

- **Women’s depression**
  - Low
  - Medium
  - High

- **Men’s depression**
  - Low partner support
  - Medium partner support
  - High partner support

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Legend:
- Red circle: Low partner support
- Green circle: Medium partner support
- Blue circle: High partner support
Men’s perception of received support: effect on their anxiety

Women’s anxiety

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- Red: Low partner support
- Green: Medium partner support
- Blue: High partner support
Men’s perception of received support: effect on their depression

Women’s depression

SC

Low

Medium

High

Men’s depression

Women’s depression

ART

Low partner support

Medium partner support

High partner support

T1

T2

T3
Summary and conclusions

- ART women: they provide and receive less support
  - their resources are depleted
  - support from their partner might be insufficient or not in line with their expectations

- ART couples: support received does not act as a buffer against prenatal anxiety and depression

- Anxiety levels decrease over the course of the pregnancy
Thank you for your attention!

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