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

Gameiro et al., 2016; De Berardis, 2014; El Kissi et al., 2013; Boivin, 2003; Daniluk & Pattinson, 1993
Background (2)

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

- Male: 39.20%
- Female: 25.50%
- Mixed: 17.70%
- Undetermined: 17.60%
Study design

- **T1**
  - Dyadic coping (DCI)
    - Bodenmann, 2008
  - Anxiety (STAI)
    - Spielberger, 1983
  - Depression (EPDS)
    - Cox et al., 1987

- **T2**
  - Questionnaires

- **T3**
  - Questionnaires

- **Stressor**: first trimester screening

- **12 weeks**

- **14 weeks**

- **22 weeks**
  - Prenatal screening have now been completed
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 received by women

Support provided by men

ART men

SC men

ART women

SC women

Linear mixed model

ns

ns

ns

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ns
Support received by men

Support provided by women

** ns

* ns

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ART men

ART women

SC men

SC women
Women’s perception of received support: effect on their anxiety

Men’s anxiety

Low partner support
Medium partner support
High partner support

Women’s anxiety

SC

Low
Medium
High

T1 T2 T3

ART

Low partner support
Medium partner support
High partner support

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

SC

Men’s depression

Low

Medium

High

Women’s depression

ART

T1 T2 T3

T1 T2 T3

T1 T2 T3

Low partner support
Medium partner support
High partner support
Men’s perception of received support: effect on their anxiety

Women’s anxiety

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*ART*
Men’s perception of received support: effect on their depression

Women’s depression

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Men’s depression

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Women’s depression

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- Red: Low partner support
- Green: Medium partner support
- Blue: High partner support
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!

Contact and information:

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