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Infertility: Male and Female Perspectives

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Abstract

Although the experience of infertility has been a widely investigated phenomenon, the particular perspective of each gender has received little research attention. The primary objective of the present study was to generate a grounded theory regarding the lived experiences of infertility from male and female perspectives. Ten couples involved in varying stages of the infertility process participated in a series of interviews. Each interview was audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Participants collectively described changes over time in their reaction to, and experience of, infertility. A local theory was generated from the data which described an evolving process whereby participants adjusted to living with infertility. Hence, the core category of adapting to living with infertility emerged, as it clearly underpinned the participants' data when discussing the psycho-social experiences of infertility. For participants to deal with, respond to, and overcome the effects associated with the phenomenon in a productive manner, an adaptation to living with infertility was required. It was determined that the core category consisted of four pre-existing conditions. The first of these conditions contributing to the core category of adapting to living with infertility related to participants' rationale for desiring the parenthood experience. The second pre-existing condition was based upon the medical process undergone by all participants. Participants' attempts to make meaning of events comprised the third pre-existing condition, and finally, lifestyle adjustments constituted the fourth pre-existing condition involved in the core category of adjusting to living with infertility. The second objective of the present research pertained to gender specific experiences within these conditions. It was established that, although women and men experience some aspects of infertility in a similar manner, they are affected differently by the experience in some areas of life. The findings, together with implications for future research, and for working clinicians are discussed in more detail.

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Table of Contents

Abstract		i
Acknowledgments		ii
Table of Contents		iii
List of Tables and Figures		iv
PART ONE:	INTRODUCTION	
<i>Overview of Introduction</i>		1
Chapter One:	Introduction and Literature review	3
Chapter Two:	Theoretical Models	26
Chapter Three:	Grounded Theory	36
Chapter Four:	Methodology	46
PART TWO:	FINDINGS	
<i>Overview of Findings</i>		57
Chapter Five:	Personal Profiles	59
Chapter Six:	Core Category and its Pre-Existing Conditions	73
Chapter Seven:	Parenthood	81
Chapter Eight:	Reactions to the Medical Process	90
Chapter Nine:	Making Meaning of Events	107
Chapter Ten:	Lifestyle Adjustments	129
Chapter Eleven:	Integration	142
Chapter Twelve:	Gender Specific Experiences	147
PART THREE:	DISCUSSION AND EVALUTION	
<i>Overview of Discussion</i>		158
Chapter Thirteen:	Discussion	159
Chapter Fourteen:	Evaluation of the Research	173
References		182
Appendices		189

List of Tables and Figures

Table One: Main Causes of Infertility	7
Table Two: Treatment, and Costs of Infertility Procedures in New Zealand	14
Table Three: Core Category and its Pre-Existing Conditions	73
Figure One: First Pre-Existing Condition of Parenthood Contributing to the Core Category of Adapting to Living with Infertility	81
Figure Two: Second Pre-Existing Condition of Reactions to the Medical Process Contributing to the Core Category of Adapting to Living with Infertility	90
Figure Three: Third Pre-Existing Condition of Making Meaning of Events Contributing to the Core Category of Adapting to Living with Infertility	107
Figure Four: Fourth Pre-Existing Condition of Lifestyle Adjustments Contributing to the Core Category of Adapting to Living with Infertility	129

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

Overview of Introduction

Although the experience of infertility has been a widely investigated phenomenon, there has been a dearth of literature pertaining to the perspectives of both genders. While prior research in the field has focused mainly on the experiences of women, few studies have been conducted with the specific intent of examining men's responses to infertility.

There exists, however, a range of literature that bears relevance to the topic in general. A broad review is undertaken in the introduction to this study in order to cover multiple aspects of the experience. Together, diagnosis and treatment procedures are outlined. Advanced technology now offers a range of alternative choices for couples to consider when in pursuit of conception. These options are outlined. Literature that describes psychosocial aspects of infertility is surveyed, and the salient literature regarding gender specific experiences is examined.

The experience of infertility is characterised by a range of responses. To help define such reactions, researchers have attempted to categorise the responses to infertility into differing theoretical models. Chapter two reviews these paradigms (i.e. grief, crisis, developmental crisis, and cultural and medical models). These models are defined and discussed in relation to infertility, and their appropriateness of use is critiqued.

The following chapter establishes an understanding of the analytical methodology of qualitative research and the grounded theory approach. This is achieved through providing definitions and rationales for utilising a qualitative stance. The definition of grounded theory and its origins are outlined, followed by details of the procedures involved in undertaking this specific methodological approach. The criterion for assessing grounded theory research also is detailed.

Finally, the method applied in conducting the present study is outlined. Firstly, the objectives of the research are listed. This is followed by a brief discussion pertaining to the participants and ethical considerations. The method of data collection (interviews) is discussed, along with the rationale for using a semi-structured interview format. The precise process of data collection, entailing a description of the initial contact with participants, the interview process, transcription, and follow-up.

The introduction provides an insight into the background of the phenomenon under inquiry, that of the experience of infertility. It investigates the specific issues involved and critiques the models commonly applied in its research. It outlines the methodological procedure and provides a clear rationale for their application in relation to the present study.