

SOCIO PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES FACED BY WOMEN: A CASE STUDY OF INFERTILITY

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Abstract: Fertility is the natural capability to produce offspring. The inability to conceive and reproduce is termed as infertility. There are various factors leading to infertility like age, disease or the structure of the reproductive system. Infertility is a serious issue that is treated as a taboo thus has various social-psychological consequences. The data was collected from a sample of 40 respondent selected by snowball sampling using a semi-structured questionnaire from Rawalpindi city. The research was conducted over period of two month. The findings of the study revealed that infertile people face many difficulties when it comes to marital life. The family and society overall treated the infertile as a taboo; revolting and repellent excluding them from all social and cultural activities including decision making at familial level and participation in any cultural festivals. The exclusion thus made the infertile face serious psychological issues like depression, anxiety, guilt and dissatisfaction.

Key Words: Infertility, Psychological, Depression, Anxiety, Social adjustment

INTRODUCTION

Fertility is the natural capability to produce children however some individuals are biologically incapable of performing this process. Typically infertility is diagnosed after 12 months of focused attempt to conceive. "Marital infertility is understood as the absence of pregnancy after 12 months of regular sexual intercourse without using contraception" (Ferreira, et al. 2015). Infertility is a major issue for the affectees. The individuals not only face the natural sorrow that comes with the inability to produce children, but also face a social stigma attached to the issue, that leads to various psychological diseases like stress, anxiety, fretfulness, depression etc. The infertile couple faces disappointment and becomes dissatisfied with their partner. "Infertile couples experience psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, aggression, guilt feeling, criticism, fright, feeling of discontent, jealousy, solitude, lack of self-esteem, lack of flexibility with their partner and sexual dissatisfaction" (Ramazanzadeh, et al. 2009). The extent and severity of the stigma attached to this inability to produce varies from culture to culture. Various gender biases are

attached to the issue. In most of the Asian cultures, if a couple is found to be infertile, then automatically the woman is considered to be the infertile one. "Approximately one third of couples who find it difficult to achieve a pregnancy will assume the women to be infertile, with a third in the man and another third with the interaction of both, only 20% are idiopathic" (Chandra, et al. 2005). Infertility is a grave situation that entirely envelopes the lives of the couple. "The inability to conceive children is experienced by individuals and couples as a stressful and often heartbreaking situation. As a medical issue, impaired fertility affects approximately 80 million people from all parts of the world" (World Health Organization 2002).

The society excludes these couples from the natural cultural setup thus the world of the infertile is completely separate. "In some cultures motherhood is the only way for women to enhance their status in their family and community. In the united states specialist who study infertility have noted that infertile couples are one of the most neglected and silent minorities" (Cousineau and Domar 2007).

Due to constant social exclusion, these women start facing various ailments. The behavior of the family and in-laws and the overall social network changes which inevitably affects them psychologically. "Depression is more common among infertile women as compare to fertile or pregnant women" (Matsubayashi, et al. 2001). There are many difficulties faced by the infertile woman; social adjustment and exclusion specifically. Often she feels jealousy from the fertile women as fertile women get a higher social status and respect from the in-laws and society. "One of the most difficult aspects that infertile women describe is the difficulty in social setting, such as dealing with feelings of jealousy and envy when learning of other women pregnancies or being in the presence with other who have infants" (Cousineau and Domar 2007). The people deprived from the blessing of offspring live alone. "Infertile couples often experience marked isolation from the fertile world, in part due to perceived or real social unacceptability and lack of empathy from family and friends regarding their depth of despair" (Rutstein and Shah 2004). Infertility affects the conjugal life too. Constant depression, isolation and exclusion leads to sundered relationship between the husband and wife. "The differences that exist between men and women concerning infertility can sometime cause mutual problems between the couples" (Hassani 2010).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study focused on socio psychological issues attached with infertility. The locale of the study was different hospitals of Rawalpindi. The sample of 40 respondents was selected through snowball sampling. The sample units included the infertile people.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned above, infertility has been described as a major crisis. Infertility forces people to pass, through a chain of emotional changes. Infertility can cause depression, anxiety, sexual dysfunction, loneliness and low self-esteem. "There is no doubt that infertility is a stressful experience and has a high impact on couples' psychological status. The problems of infertile couples are complicated" (Hassani2010). The infertile women have more problems than the infertile men. Society and in-laws taunt the infertile woman, ignoring the grief she might be

going through. She is excluded from all major socio-cultural spheres. Her participation in the decision making of the household affairs is negligible. They are excluded and treated as a bad omen during various traditional marriage customs. Moreover, her status within the family decreases endangering the very relationship with her husband. Mostly the respondents shared that their husbands remarried for a child. All these issues combined lead to various socio psychological issues in their life. The behavior of the families and overall society either makes them aggressive, or stubborn. Panic attacks are also common in infertile woman because these women are in constant grief.

Case No. 1

Asmat a 50 years old woman, married to Mr. Y, 56, lived in a nuclear family system in Rawalpindi. Asmat was metric while her husband education was F.A. and worked as a cleric in school. Being an infertile couple they felt a lot of stress and depression. After various medical checkups Asmat was found to be the infertile one. She was not able to conceive due to some problem with her reproductive system. Years went by, doctor after doctor was changed but still she was not able to conceive. They were constantly taunted by their in-laws keeping them in constant stress. Asmat started staying depressed and missed the joy of children. Watching children of other people play and go to school increased her depression. The couple shared that infertility makes a couple lose his self-esteem, confidence, love and health. They agreed the infertile couple faced many problems regarding their security in family and society.

Case No. 2

Ayesha was 35 years old and a divorcee. Her husband was 39. They lived in a joint family system in a house at Sadiqabad, Rawalpindi. Ayesha was F.A. pass and worked in a private hostel as an administrator. She got married 17 years ago and was childless. Infertility affected her overall life as her husband was not cooperative. She face dissues with her in-laws too. Her mother and sister in- law taunted her as she could not produce a child. With the passage of time her husband became more and more aggressive. She was not allowed to get any treatment and thus with the assistance of her mother in-law Ayesha was divorced while her

husband remarried. Now she lives alone with her mother. She stated that infertility truly changed her life, and brought her immense sorrow. She affirmed that she faced various psychological diseases like depression, anxiety, stress and was prone to panic attacks.

Case No.3

Rizwana was 36, while her husband was 40 years old. She was a house wife and her husband was a government employ. They lived in joint family system. She got married at the age of 19 year old. Rizwana could not conceive as she had some problem in her reproductive system. She got treatment for it too but unluckily she still was not able to conceive. Even though her husband was cooperative in the beginning after some time he also could not handle the pain and missed the joy of child and decided to go for a second marriage. He got married again and as could be predicted he started loving his second wife more as she provided him with best joy in the world. Rizwan living under the same roof could not bear the loneliness. She felt depressed, was under constant social pressure. She was teased, compared and taunted. She was ignored to the extent that she herself could not feel if she was alive or not, the cloak of infertility made in invisible. She most grievously agreed that infertility makes a woman lose her status, relationships and health.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that the infertile couples face many problems within the family and the society as well. If it is a woman then the situation gets seriously amplified, weakening their position in the family and the society.

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