

INTER-SEX-TIONS

A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF COUPLES FACING HIV- AND- INFERTILITY

in an Assisted Reproduction Clinic in Cape Town, South Africa:
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HEALTH POLICY

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study question

What are experiences of Infertile, HIV Positive Sero-discordant couples presenting at an Assisted Reproduction Clinic in Cape Town South Africa and how can they be translated into Health Policy?

summary answer

Results showed that a) HIV negative partners' perception of contracting HIV b) relatively limited financial resources and c) medical procedures, did not dampen desire for children. The majority of participants felt excluded from interacting with existing state infertility clinics practice. The findings highlight the need for a review of existing policy and practice guidelines as well as counselling guidelines for this special population.

what is known already

Increased access to anti-retroviral treatment and lifespan of HIV positive people has led HIV positive people of childbearing age to try and reproduce. Infertility is a major health burden in developing countries. In sub-Saharan Africa up to 30% of couples are estimated to face infertility (Dyer, 2005). HIV stigma and stigma around infertility are well documented. (Dyer 2005). There are gaps in qualitative research, health policy and practice around this special population.

study discussion

Patients attending a private fertility clinic in Cape Town received a written invitation from the clinic to participate. Ethical permission was granted by the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business Ethics Committee. 7 patients accepted. 4 included both the male and female partners in heterosexual HIV sero-discordant relationships. 3 participants were women in HIV sero-discordant heterosexual relationships whose male partner choose not to participate. Participants were given pseudonyms from the outset of the interviews. Semi structured interviews were conducted. Interviews were transcribed, data was coded and analysed for thematic content using grounded theory.

main results

Results showed concentrated efforts from participants around secrecy around both the HIV and the Infertility conditions, due to fear of being judged by family and society for being HIV positive and wanting to have children. This was experienced as a double stigma and as burdensome. Despite these real constraints, in almost all participants' cases, there was a convergence of employing biomedical knowledge, psychological resilience, with this group despite previously experienced practices at clinics that the majority of participants perceived as exclusionary. The implications are that health policy and clinic practices in this area needs to be more broadly reviewed.

Limitations, reasons for caution

A bigger sample size is the next step.

Wider implications of the findings

A wider review of Health Policy and Clinic Practices in South Africa for People Living with HIV-and -Infertility.

Quotes

1. "Nobody knows. [about husband being HIV Positive]. It's only me and him. Nobody.... He's not ready yet to tell anybody. By that time we found out about his status, he was crying, he wanted to die.... He wanted to leave me, he said he will never touch me again because he doesn't want to affect my life. I was sitting next to him asking him, do you know why I am here in your life? It's because I love you...no matter what is going on.... I even said to him, I can take the risk.... I love my husband....His HIV status is not killing me. What is killing me... my mother in law will ask "Where is the baby?""

Theminkosi, aged 37. Black South African HIV Negative Infertile Woman from Gugulethu married to a man Living with HIV (who was not part of the study).

2. "Nobody knows [about the HIV or struggling to fall pregnant]. It's stressful sometimes when you're married, and in our culture, you know your in-laws expect you... they will say something like 'Oh, you've been married for three or four years now, but you still don't have a baby'.... I say no, it's still early, otherwise the pain is inside. They don't know how I feel. I just say, 'No, it's still early, but I know deep down... it's a long story'".

Nozuko, aged 36. Black HIV positive Infertile Woman from Khayelitsha married to a man who is HIV Negative (who was not part of the study).

3. "Nobody knows [about his wife being HIV positive]. Not anyone. I think, actually I don't have the right, because she must tell....I did my testing before I got married, but she[his wife] never did. Actually, we never talked about it. So, for that reason, it might have happened before we met.... I am just thinking of what people will say after some time, you know, when you get married they want to see grandchildren and stuff.... On my parents side, I know they won't blame me, they will be blaming her.... The community is a problem. People judge. The community will see you differently."

Tsatsi, aged 36. Black South African HIV Negative Man from Khayelitsha married to a woman Living with HIV and Infertility (who was part of the study).