

Men's stigma management communication in cases of infertility

Infertility is defined as a couple's failure to conceive after a year of unprotected and frequent sexual intercourse ("Definitions of Infertility and Recurrent Pregnancy Loss," 2008). It affects at least 180 million people worldwide and roughly 15% of all couples in the US (Thonneau et al., 1991). **Male-factor infertility (MFI)** is between 20% and 30% of all cases of infertility (Agarwal et al., 2015). Additionally, male is a contributing factor for another 30% to 40% of cases of infertility (Hull et al., 1985). These statistics collectively make the male role in infertility cases almost 50%. Despite this significant percentage of male-factor infertility, there is not much discussion about male infertility, especially in developing countries.

Research questions.

- How do men understand, experience, and cope with their infertility
- How does men's perception of masculinity play a role in making sense of their infertility?
- How does gender play a role in men's disclosure and communication about their infertility?
- What communication strategies do men use to cope with the stigma associated with men's infertility?

Methods

I will conduct a qualitative study with Pakistani and American men experiencing MFI. I will conduct in-depth interviews with 50 infertile men (25 each from the USA and Pakistan). The participants will be recruited from fertility treatment clinics and through referrals from local NGOs working on reproductive health issues. From Pakistan, the potential participants will be recruited from fertility clinics including, but not limited to, Hameed Latif Lahore and Medicsi Islamabad. I will be working with Quaid-i-Azam University's Gender Studies Department.

Significance of the study

This study will explore the connections between this vulnerability and the expectations associated with hegemonic masculinity, defined as characteristics such as power and control where men are often discouraged from sharing their vulnerabilities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Men's openness toward and acceptance of MFI as a health issue, not a threat to their masculinity, may improve men's willingness to talk about infertility and manage the stigma around it in a healthier way. Men's participation in conversations about MFI may help reduce

women's burden of infertility as many times women are pushed to seek medical assistance way before men's screening.

References

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