

Implications for Counseling and Service Delivery on the Psychological Trajectories of Women Undergoing in Vitro Fertilization (IVF) Treatment in Hong Kong

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Abstract : Introduction: The experience of infertility could be excruciating but has not received much attention in Hong Kong. The strong Confucian culture pressures couples to continue their family lineage resulting in women facing more stress than men in the social-cultural milieu. In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) treatment is one of the common ways to deal with the problem. Abundant literature exists the psychological trajectories of people receiving IVF treatment in Europe, the USA and other east Asian societies but not in Hong Kong. Aim: This study aims to highlight the circumstances and needs of the women before, during and after IVF treatment through examining their lived experiences. It is hoped that the public, once informed of regarding their tribulations and needs , would support the adequate provision of the required psychological support . Methods: Qualitative analysis was adopted in this study. In-depth interviews were conducted with six women who have undergone at least one complete cycle of IVF treatment within the past five years. Data was analyzed through thematic analysis and narrative analysis. Results: 4 broad themes were found, including (i) emotional responses; (ii) experiences in medical consultation; (iii) impacts of the treatment; and (iv) their coping strategies. Additionally, specific events in three cases were chosen for narrative analysis to further examine their unresolved emotional distress and the ethical issues. Conclusion: IVF treatment distressed the interviewees immensely, both physically and psychologically, with the negative emotions outweighing their physical strains, a result unexpected by all of the interviewees. The pressure for lineage continuation, the demanding treatment process and the dearth of support from health professionals all contribute to their emotional pain which could linger for both successful and unsuccessful cases. Although a number of coping strategies were attempted, most of them completely failed to ease their psychological tension. The findings of this study therefore evidence the need for psychological support for this population. A service model to cater their needs of IVF treatment before, during and after treatment is therefore proposed.

Keywords : coping strategies, emotional experiences, impacts of IVF, infertility, IVF treatment, medical experiences

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