

Gender Stereotypes in Reproductive Medicine with Regard to Parental Age

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Abstract : Detrimental outcomes of advanced maternal age on the chances of fertilization, pregnancy as well as mother and fetus health have been recognized for several decades. It seemed interesting to investigate whether there is a comparable awareness of the detrimental influence on the reproductive outcomes of late fatherhood, given that it has been already ten years since an intense and growing interest concerning later-age fatherhood commenced in medical research. To address that issue a two-step research was done. First, we performed a review of the subject literature to answer the following questions: 1) What age is defined as advanced?; 2) Is the same age defined as advanced in both genders?; 3) What terminology concerning age issues is used?; 4) Is the same age terminology used regarding both genders? The second part of our studies was devoted to the views of medical students. This part of our research comprised both quantitative and qualitative studies. Opinions of medical students in one of the Polish medical universities on several issues connected with assisted reproduction technology (ART) were gathered: 1) students' attitude to in vitro fertilization (IVF) for women over 40 and for postmenopausal women; 2) students' attitude to late fatherhood; 3) students' reasoning given against acceptability of IVF procedure for all of these group of patients involved in an IVF procedure. Our analyses revealed that: First, there is no universal definition of the term 'advanced age'; secondly, there is a general tendency to adopt different age limits depending on whether they refer to maternal or paternal age, but no justification is provided by the researchers explaining why they set different age limits for women and men; thirdly, the image of postponed fatherhood stands in stark contrast to postponed motherhood - while postponed fatherhood is frequently portrayed as a reasonable and conscious decision enabling a stable family environment for a child, the reasonableness of postponed motherhood is often questioned; finally, the bias regarding maternal versus paternal age is deeply embedded in medical students' attitude to IVF for women over 40 and for postmenopausal women.

Keywords : gender stereotypes, reproductive medicine, maternal age, paternal age

Conference Title : ICGFWS 2017 : International Conference on Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies

Conference Location : Singapore, Singapore

Conference Dates : January 08-09, 2017