

Extended Abstract for European Population Conference 2006.

Theme: Fertility (Convenor: Hans Peter Kohler, Germany).

Title: Fertility and family histories among couples before and after assisted reproductive treatment in Denmark - a comparison with contemporary fertile couples.

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Extended Abstract

Background

The aim of this study is through multiple regression analysis to present a model that provides clarification of whether or not the fertility and family histories among couples before and after assisted reproductive treatment is different from the histories of couples giving birth to naturally conceived children.

The psychosocial aspects of infertility and the available treatments has in the past two decades been the focus of several studies, as have the children born after In Vitro Fertilization with respect to particularly medical aspects. Also the psychosocial wellbeing of couples becoming parents after assisted reproductive treatment and that of their children have been researched. This knowledge constitutes the basis for the present study on the fertility and family histories among couples before and after assisted reproductive treatment in Denmark, including a comparison with contemporary fertile couples. The study is based on the assumption that the experience of involuntary childlessness and an invasive treatment as In Vitro Fertilization, regardless of whether the treatment results in the birth of a child, is a strongly influential factor in relation to the couples' relation.

Material and methods

The study is based on data from national, population-based registers in Denmark. Since August 1st 1994 each IVF-treatment (incl. ICSI-, FER- and ED-treatments) initiated at a Danish fertility clinic has to be notified to the IVF-register in the National Board of Health, including information on the cause of infertility, stimulation, course of treatment, number of retrieved and transferred eggs, information on whether excess eggs are frozen, fertility method, course of pregnancy and any complications in this relation. For this study, a total of 12,000 women undergoing treatment 1995-1999 have been identified in the IVF-register. By use of the unique personal identification number, the information from the IVF-register has been linked to The Fertility of Women and Couples Dataset from which the women's male partners have been identified and socio-demographic information on the couple has been retrieved.

To create a relevant group of reference, information on all women aged 20 to 49 years in the period 1981-2004 and their co-receding partners is extracted from The Fertility of Women and Couples Dataset as the basis for identifying couples in the group of reference and, moreover, providing information about the socio-demographic factors. Included in the analysis is, among other

variables, age, nationality, education, employment and income of both women and men, and information about their family histories 1981-2004. The number of couples becoming parents in the years between 1995 and 1999 and therefore included in the study as the group of reference is approximately 225.000.

Part of the study includes a description of the socio-demographic characteristics of couples undergoing IVF-treatment in Denmark in the years from 1995 to 1999. The socio-demographic characteristics, such as the duration of the relationship, the composition of the family and whether there is children from previous relationships, is compared with the characteristics within a group of couples who in the same period became parents without undergoing treatment. Moreover, the histories of the families is monitored in five years after treatment was initiated for the purpose of analysing whether the course of family history differ for couples undergoing IVF-treatment when compared with the couples in the group of reference. One focus of the study is whether relationships are dissolved and whether the man or the woman enters into another relationship, perhaps obtaining parenthood. The course of family history is seen in relation to various aspects concerning the treatment, e.g., whether the treatment has resulted in the birth of a child and further, selected socio-demographic characteristics of the couple. Pure medical aspects of the IVF-treatment are outside the scope of the study, while the method of treatment, the number of treatments initiated and completed, length of time, the result and whether the treatment takes place in a private or a public clinic are included.

Analysis

At the present time the analysis has not yet been completed, but the results will be ready at the end of 2005. It is hypothesized that couples undergoing IVF-treatment on the one hand has an increased risk of ending their relationships due to the psychosocial pressure that infertility apply on the men and women affected. Additionally, ending a relationship and thereafter entering into another is seen as indicating that there may still be a belief in the possibility that one may become a parent and one might also argue that the child wish is stronger than the wish for spending one's life with the respective partner. On the other hand it is hypothesized that the fact that a man and a woman has been trough this experience together has strengthened their relationship resulting in a decreased risk of ending the relationship. An unmarried couple contracting marriage after initiated IVF-treatment is seen as an indication of such a stronger commitment.