The Early Postpartum Experience of Previously Infertile Mothers: An Emerging Area of Research

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Disclosures / Objectives

• Research partially supported by STTI Theta Epsilon Chapter and Philippine Nurses Association of America
• No conflict of interest
• Objectives – At the end of this presentation, the audience will be able to:
  a. Describe the lived experience of first-time, previously infertile mothers in the Central Florida area of the United States of America.
  b. Discuss the practice, research, and policy implications related to the study findings.
Research Question

What is the lived experience of previously infertile mothers in the early postpartum period?
Significance

• 5.6 to 27.3% of the 7 million infertile women in the US eventually give birth and become mothers

• Positive transition to new motherhood is key to well-being of mother, infant, and family
• Little is known about transition to motherhood after fertility treatment

• Likely high risk because:
  ➢ Transition to motherhood carries some risk under any circumstance
  ➢ Greater incidence of depression during fertility treatment and prior history of depression increases risk for postpartum depression
  ➢ Clinical data suggest PIM may have unrealistic expectations about motherhood and do not feel justified to voice their distress
Design and Sample

- **Design**: descriptive phenomenology
- **Sample**: 12 adult previously infertile, first-time mothers
- **Inclusion criteria:**
  - ≥ 18 years old
  - first-born child conceived from fertility treatment less than 3 years old
  - English ability
  - Reside in Central Florida area
Recruitment

- OB/GYN practices
- Pediatric practices
- Fertility practices
- Professional organizations
- Social networking site
- Participant referrals
Data Collection

• Demographic form

• Interview guide
  ➢ Main question: “What is it like being a new mother after infertility?”
  ➢ Prompts were used to elicit elaboration

• Taped, semi-structured interviews conducted twice

• Interviews conducted face-to-face
Data Analysis

• Principal analysis using Colaizzi’s method
  ➢ Reviewed each transcript
  ➢ Extracted significant statements and formulated meanings
  ➢ Organized meanings into theme clusters
  ➢ Compiled detailed, analytic descriptions of themes
  ➢ Identified fundamental structure of experience of new motherhood for PIM
  ➢ Obtained validation of structure by returning findings to participants

• Additional validation: PhD in Nursing student & 2 new participants who reviewed findings & provided feedback
## Demographic characteristics (n=12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age range</td>
<td>27 to 43 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bachelor’s, Master’s, or Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Some college or technical school</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Length of time from treatment to pregnancy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- &lt; 6 months</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 6 months to 1 year</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 1 year to 4 years</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- &gt; 4 years</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
• Lingering Identity as Infertile

• Gratitude for the Gift of Motherhood
Lingering Identity as Infertile

• Anxiety over Pregnancy

• Perceiving Motherhood as Surreal

• Feeling Unprepared for the Role of Mother
Anxiety over Pregnancy

“You just can’t believe it’s happening to you so something’s gonna go wrong. You’re just so terrified. I didn’t allow myself to get attached, to think too far ahead.”

“Through the whole pregnancy I was so worried about her. I had a monitor for her heartbeat that my friend let me borrow. Every day. Three times a day. I was insane. Just constant fear.”
Perceiving Motherhood as Surreal

“Are the babies really here? It’s not a dream? Did they come through birth ok? Do I really have babies and not still going through (fertility treatment)?”

“The first thought I had when they put him in my arms was, ‘This is my baby?’ I couldn’t believe that he was mine, that he had been growing inside of me.”
Feeling Unprepared for the Role of Mother

“During infertility you go through so much, you research everything, how to get pregnant. But you don’t research what to do when you actually have the baby.”

“I really had no idea that those first three months would be that excruciating. I thought I’d be tired with a smile. I thought tired would be just at night time.”
Gratitude for the Gift of Motherhood

• Needing to be the Perfect Mother
• Feeling Censored
“I was really careful with her. Almost as if she were a porcelain doll. Just tried to do everything by the book. Just wanted to do everything right.”

“I am breastfeeding this child. I don’t care what I have to do. I’m gonna make it happen. I drank the teas, I did the classes, I did the support groups, I had the lactation consultant, I took the special herbs, and I breastfed every hour to build my supply. It made me crazy.”
Feeling Censored

“Because of everything I went through to get him that psychologically I make myself feel like I can’t complain about it. Because I could be in a different place. I could be alone.”

“I would have thoughts of harming him. I was afraid to give him baths. I was afraid to handle knives... and I kept it all to myself.”
Implications: Practice

• Transition program by fertility specialists to prepare newly pregnant previously infertile women to face realities of motherhood
• Mentorship program with trained peers to normalize conflicted feelings about motherhood
• Healthcare providers need to screen PIM for PPD and adjustment difficulties because PIMs are likely to censor complaints
• Referrals as needed to mental health professionals and support groups
Implications: Policy

• Policymakers and stakeholders to establish and fund programs for routine PPD screenings for PIM and provide targeted mental health services
Recommendations for Future Research

• Compare experiences of PIM in transition program and those who are not
• Compare PIM’s experiences of new motherhood after infertility: biological vs adoptive child
• Investigate true prevalence of PPD in PIM
• Develop interventions to help PIM cope with breastfeeding difficulties
• Explore experience of first-time fathers of infants delivered after infertility
THANK YOU!