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Comments

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Severe Depressive Symptoms Predict Individual and Partner Infertility-Related Distress at One-Year Follow-up

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Study Question

Are severe depressive symptoms at baseline a predictor of individual and partner infertility-related distress after one-year of unsuccessful fertility treatments?

What is Known Already

The experience of infertility has been linked with stressors that can increase psychological distress, such as depression.

A prior history of depression was found to be a risk factor for future depression in those undergoing fertility treatments.

Cross-sectional studies have shown that severe depressive symptoms at baseline were significantly associated with increased infertility-related distress in individuals and their partners.

Studies examining the longitudinal impact of severe depressive symptoms on infertility-related distress in couples are lacking.

Study Design, Size, Duration

The study used a longitudinal design with men and women who were consecutively referred patients undergoing fertility treatments in Denmark between 2000 and 2001.

Participants responded to questionnaires immediately before treatment initiation and at one-year follow-up.

Only those who did not achieve a pregnancy were included in the study.

Baseline Sample

- 826 men, 923 women

One-Year Follow-Up Sample

- 343 men, 402 women

Participants, Material, & Methods

Average age

- Males – 34.2 years
- Females – 31.9 years

Measures

- The Mental Health Inventory-5
- COMPI Fertility Problem Stress Scale

Multilevel modeling, using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM), was used to study the couple as the unit of analysis (See Figure 1).

Main Results

There were significant positive actor effects found for males and females on all three levels of distress

- Personal Distress
- Marital Distress
- Social Distress

Partner effects were also found, with female depressive symptoms having a greater impact on male partners.

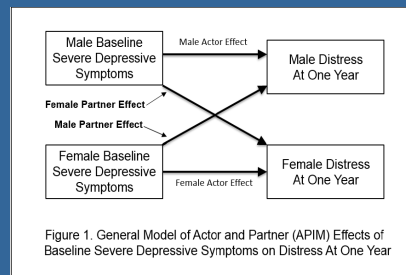


Figure 1. General Model of Actor and Partner (APIM) Effects of Baseline Severe Depressive Symptoms on Distress At One Year

Actor Effects

Baseline severe depressive symptoms significantly predicted individual distress at one-year in men and women.

Partner Effects

Male Partner Effect

Female severe depressive symptoms at baseline significantly predicted male

- Personal Distress
- Marital Distress
- Social Distress

Female Partner Effect

Male severe depressive symptoms at baseline significantly predicted female

- Marital Distress

Study Implications

Severe depressive symptoms at baseline impacts individual and partner distress after one-year of unsuccessful fertility treatment.

The study underscores the importance of studying the couple as the unit of analysis.

While depressive symptoms impact men and women individually, males appear to be more strongly impacted by a partner's depressive symptoms.

Limitations include sample size and limitations in measures

Medical and mental health professionals can work to screen patients for depressive symptoms and provide education about the relationship between depression and stress.

Fertility counseling for couples should include

- assessment to examine the impact of depressive symptoms on the couple
- education and coping skills to address individual & partner depressive symptoms
- communication strategies to discuss the impact of depression on individual & partner distress.