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PRESS RELEASE 2022

Panicked and overwhelmed: NEW study reveals the emotional and psychological impact of infertility

- New research reveals the negative impacts of infertility are diverse and profound; relationships, daily activities and overall mental health are all affected.¹
- Infertility is a significant clinical issue, estimated to affect 1 in 6 heterosexual couples globally.^{2, 3}
- 60% of people believe that the diagnosis and treatment of infertility has impacted their mental health, with one in three indicating this causes relationship strain.¹
- However, less than half (44%) of people report seeking mental health services during their infertility journey.¹
- A clear gap exists between the number of people experiencing poor mental health and the number seeking help. The study highlights that “tailoring” based on individual needs should be considered for support plans due to different needs across stages of treatment (diagnosis vs treatment), across people involved (patient vs partner) and across life domains (emotions vs daily impacts).¹
- In addition, emotions and intensity vary in nature at different stages of the infertility journey, further indicating the need for these tailored support services.¹

Saint-Prex, Switzerland – 21st April 2022 – new research published in Reproductive Biomedicine, has found that 60% of people believe that the diagnosis and treatment of infertility has impacted their mental health. This impact on mental health has been found to increase with treatment duration and number of unsuccessful attempts. In addition to the impact on individual mental health, one in three indicate that an infertility diagnosis caused their relationship to suffer and, of those, over half (55%, n=409) believe it has caused an emotional strain.¹

Infertility is a significant clinical issue, estimated to affect 1 in 6 couples globally.^{2, 3} The research from international experts in reproductive medicine and psychology, analysed the experience of nearly 2000 men and women (including both heterosexual and same-sex couple perspectives) from across the world, at a range of stages in their infertility journeys as part of a larger cross-sectional study to explore the overall time taken to progress through the infertility journey and the impact it has on all aspects of patients' and partners' lives.¹

The analyses, led by Cardiff University, in collaboration with Ferring Pharmaceuticals, found that both men and women experience a complex range of emotions; including “sadness” at infertility diagnosis and “anxiety” during treatment. The study highlighted significant differences in the nature and intensity of emotions experienced at different stages of treatment. “Depression and defeat”, “isolation” and “stigma”^{*} were significantly more prevalent at diagnosis than during treatment (p<0.001) for example, but the impact on mental health increased with treatment duration and number of unsuccessful pregnancy attempts.¹

The study highlighted a clear disparity between those experiencing a mental health impact and those seeking support.

- More than half (60.4%; n=1,174) perceived infertility journey to have impacted their mental health.¹
- Less than half (44%) reported seeking mental health services during their infertility journey.¹
- Only a third (32%) looked to online support (groups and forums).¹
- Less than a quarter (22%) sought support from a local group.¹

The gap between the number of women and men with impacted mental health compared to those that sought help, highlights the need for a renewed focus on the psychological support offered to all individuals in their family building journeys.¹

In addition to assessing the various stages of treatment, the study also looked at the different parties involved in the fertility journey. *“There is an unmet need in understanding the impact of infertility in key demographics of people such as male patients and partners of infertile patients. These perspectives are often neglected in research and in care, which can have serious implications when we consider a third of infertility issues are due to issues in male reproductive ability, a third is due to women and a third remains unknown”* said, Kira Dalgaard, Vice President and Global Head of Medical Affairs, Reproductive Medicine and Maternal Health, Ferring Pharmaceuticals. She continued *“At Ferring we believe in everyone’s right to a family but recognise that not everyone’s family building journey is simple or straightforward. This study has highlighted the complexities and impact of the emotions experienced by all those involved, at all stages of diagnosis and treatment, and has renewed our commitment to provide mental health support for everyone on their unique fertility journey.”*

To avoid long term effects on patients, these results indicate that negative feelings should be specifically addressed by healthcare professionals and tailored to the individual’s needs during the stage of the treatment journey at which the feelings are most significant. A greater emphasis on mental health support for couples who have undergone multiple treatment cycles is also evident.

The most common source of support noted in the study was “my partner”. While support from friends and family is important, this finding highlights a need for better provision of – or education around the availability of – external sources of support for infertile patients and their partners, including both patient support tools and counsellors. For patients experiencing isolation or loneliness, there could be increased education by the healthcare professional team around the availability of patient support groups or online forums to enable patients to connect with others experiencing similar emotions. *“It is encouraging that over half of responders (53%) were offered or recommended mental health support by a healthcare practitioner, but we need to do more. Improved, tailored patient care is required throughout the entire patient journey, and for the effects on partners to be taken into consideration,”* said Professor Jacky Boivin, lead study author from Cardiff University.

The full research findings are now available in Reproductive BioMedicine Online: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rbmo.2022.01.015> .

* Respondents were asked to recount their emotional responses to diagnosis and treatment and could select between 21 pre-specified emotional responses. These responses were then grouped into four

theoretical categories for further analysis: 'overwhelmed and panic', 'depression and defeat', 'stigma' and 'isolation'.

About the study

An online, international, quantitative survey to assess the impact of infertility on mental health and relationships which was part of a larger cross-sectional study that aimed to explore the overall time taken to progress through the infertility journey and the impact it had on all aspects of patients' and partners' lives. A total of 1944 respondents from the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Australia and China were recruited.¹

Respondents were male or female infertile patients (n=1,037) or partners to infertile patients (n=907; not necessarily partners of the patient sample) and recruited at different stages of the treatment journey.¹

The initial findings from this study, first presented at the 36th ESHRE Annual Meeting (5–8 July 2020) and published in September 2021, found that respondents waited an average of 3.2 years before receiving a medical infertility diagnosis, spent 2.0 years attempting to achieve pregnancy without assistance before treatment, and received 1.6 years of treatment before successful respondents achieved pregnancy.⁴

About Ferring Pharmaceuticals

Ferring Pharmaceuticals is a research-driven, specialty biopharmaceutical group committed to helping people around the world build families and live better lives. Headquartered in Saint-Prex, Switzerland, Ferring is a leader in reproductive medicine and maternal health, and in specialty areas within gastroenterology and urology. Ferring has been developing treatments for mothers and babies for over 50 years and has a portfolio covering treatments from conception to birth. Founded in 1950, privately-owned Ferring now employs around 6,000 people worldwide, has its own operating subsidiaries in more than 50 countries, and markets its products in 110 countries.

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