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Exploring the Impact of Infertility on Women

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BACKGROUND

In the U.S., approximately 16% of couples, or roughly 5 million individuals, are diagnosed with infertility (Collins, 2019). Research has shown that the experience of infertility can have both physical and psychological consequences on the health and well-being of an individual as well as on their partner (Tao et al., 2011). The literature demonstrates that the experience of infertility impacts women in a multitude of ways, limiting their ability to participate in daily occupations and fulfil their roles.

PROBLEM

Currently, research is limited on how infertility affects daily occupations and roles, and the role of occupational therapy in providing services to women who have experience with infertility. This is an area that needs to be further explored in order to gain a better understanding of what occupational therapy has to offer.

PURPOSE

To further assess the occupational needs of women who have experience with infertility to gain a better understanding of how infertility impacts their daily occupations and roles. Once their occupational needs are better understood, this information will help identify occupational therapy's role in providing services to this population. Exploring the occupational needs of this population will also support future development of appropriate occupational therapy programs and services to provide care in areas that may currently be lacking.

METHODS

IRB Approval: Approval was obtained prior to the beginning of the research study.

Research Question: For women who have experience with infertility, what impact to occupations and roles do they experience?

Recruitment: Convenience sampling (personal connections, word of mouth) and snowball sampling.

Interviews: Interviewed 7 participants via Zoom for a duration of 45-60 mins. Transcribed through Microsoft dictation tool and data coded through Dedoose and then analyzed for themes. Member-checking was conducted to ensure accuracy of transcripts and to increase trustworthiness.

Photo-elicitation: Each participant provided a photo following the prompt – take or provide a photo that you feel captures your experience with infertility.

Observations: Support groups and conversations with individuals who have experience in working with this population.

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS FOR OT

The results of this study indicated various ways in which occupations and roles were impacted which support a potential role for OT in providing resources and support to this population. Some potential avenues that OT can have in providing resources and support to this population include advocacy and the creation of a potential role in settings such as primary care, OB/GYN, and fertility clinics.

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RESULTS

Themes	Descriptors	Quotes
Shift in how to participate in occupations	Social participation: Disengagement due to feeling left out and lack of understanding from others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Sometimes activities were kind of more like kid-oriented and so yeah, I just didn’t feel like I belonged with that group of people.” “I had to give myself permission to be like I don’t want to be at the baby shower and they don’t want me to be there being like sad at a baby shower.”
	Work: Recognizing that not having kids allows one to pursue other interests Quitting work or switching jobs to focus on conceiving Self-care: Increased engagement in self-care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “I would say on a positive note it has allowed me to pursue other things. I’ve been able to be heavily involved with my profession. If I had had kids, I wouldn’t be able to devote all the energy to that.” “I decided to take a break from work to focus on this.” “I switched jobs because one job was stressing me out and I thought with this new job, I’m more refreshed, less stressed, I’ll probably conceive.” “I’m trying to focus on self-care and journaling.” “I took time off work. I really enjoyed myself, like, treated myself and took special self-care and yoga and like healing things.”
Shift in individual role and role of others	Individual: Taking on unexpected role of advocate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “It’s become somewhat of an advocacy role that I feel like I’ve taken on as well that like trying to educate people who are a part of your outer circle of how to respond to you when you are going through this and some things to say and not to say.”
	Others: Being unable to provide others role such as father/grandparent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “I’ll see my husband like smiling and waving at the little kids and see how great he is with them and it makes me sad, that you know, we will never have that and that I can’t give that to my husband.” “I do feel kind of guilty that my in-laws will never have grandkids because I know how meaningful that can be.”



Image 1: Wobble toy



Image 2: Embryo watercolor art



Image 3: Medications and injections