ABSTRACT

Infertility has been recognized as a potentially serious, costly and burdensome problem for affected families. Not having children leads to losses such as the loss of individual, physical and mental well being of couples, life goals, reputation, self confidence and financial losses. Infertility is reported to be more distressing for women than it is for men. Women invest more in having children and are more treatment oriented than men owing to psychological, social and economic consequences of infertility for them.

The present study was conducted to explore the lived in experience of childless women. Main objective of the study was to understand the phenomenon of infertility through experiences of childless women undergoing assisted reproductive technique, to gain insight into psychological, social, cultural and economical consequences of childlessness among women and to describe health seeking behavior and coping mechanism adopted by childless women.

Qualitative research approach with hermeneutic phenomenology was opted for the study. Data was collected by face to face in depth interview, using interview guide from 22 childless women who met inclusion criteria. Women who had not started with ART or had adopted a child were excluded. Criterion purposive sampling technique was used to select samples. Study was undertaken at a selected infertility clinic and the data was collected using personal data sheet and interview guide. Interview guide was validated from 7 experts. I- CVI index was found to be between 0.85 -1.00 and S- CVI was found to be 0.95.

The study was approved by the institutional Ethical Committee of Maharishi Markandeshwar University. In depth face to face interviews were audio taped using a digital recorder. Length of interview lasted from 45 min to 70 minutes. Interviews were conducted from February 2014 to August 2014. All interviews were conducted in the IVF clinic only. Data analysis was done concurrent to data collection using Heideggerian Hermeneutic philosophy. Researcher employed, Diekelmann and colleagues (1989) seven stage process of data analysis. Rigor of the study was established by choosing sample with maximum variance, thick description of verbatim, prolonged engagement, peer debriefing and triangulation of data.
Personal variables of participants had wide variation as the mean age of participants was 29.68 (Range 23-40 yrs). Educational status ranged from being illiterate to be postgraduate. Monthly family income for the participants ranged from Rs 2 - 3,000/- to Rs 60,000/-. Mean duration of marriage among participants was 8.4yrs (3- 24 yrs) and mean duration for trying for conception was 7.92 yrs (1 yrs 9 months – 24 yrs). Findings of the study revealed Six (06) Meta-themes, 16 themes and 48 subthemes describing experiences of childless women. Six meta themes included: 1) Impact of infertility, 2) Environmental Influence, 3) Effect on relations, 4) Treatment seeking behavior, 5) Coping strategies adopted and 6) Desire of motherhood.

Childless women described in detail, their emotional reactions to the hardships of infertility. Having a baby was considered to be an essential and the most valuable asset for women, under social and religious realms. A child brings honor and esteem for any women in the society, where as lacking in fulfilling this role leads to psychological, social and physical violence. Childlessness exerts its toll on relations of childless women affecting marital and social relations. Most of the women followed religious activities, alternative therapies as well as medical treatment for conception and to overcome infertility, even though they had a scientific outlook toward the disease. Financial implications and stress of the treatment was very loud among participants. Women utilized emotional focus as well as problem focus coping strategies, while avoiding people, crying alone, praying to God for blessings, seeking different treatment modalities and seeking family support were the most preferred methods. The main reasons stated to have a child were: stability in marriage, bringing happiness to family, continuing family line and security for elderly days. Life without children was perceived not to be worth living as there would be no body to inherit the property and wealth. Majority of the participants were not in favor of adoption and those who had given a thought kept it as their last resort. Reasons for non acceptance of adoption expressed by participants were: a strong desire to have their own biological child, family and cultural reasons.

It was concluded that childlessness affects subjective well being and quality of life among women. They perceived large gap between life expectations and achievements. Women face personal, social and economic consequences on regular basis and look out for options to deal with these. Study recommends effective counseling, reassurance and awareness to reduce the impact of the childlessness.
Recommendation for policy makers and religious leaders were also stated to reduce stigma and economic burden of disease.

Key Words: Phenomenological, Childless Women, Infertility, Lived in Experience.