Infertility as a reason for adoption: A descriptive study

Jing Wang1, Misaki N. Natsuaki1, Leslie D. Leve2, Jenae M. Neiderhiser3, Daniel S. Shaw4, Jody Gamban5, and David Reiss6

1University of California-Riverside, 2University of Oregon, 3The Pennsylvania State University, 4University of Pittsburgh, 5George Washington University, 6Yale University

Introduction

Prior qualitative studies have identified infertility as a major reason couples decide to adopt a child (e.g., Goldberg et al., 2009; Thorn, 2010).

However, knowledge about infertility and couple’s reasoning in deciding to adopt a child is limited with many studies relying on anecdotal accounts (Kupecky & Anderson, 1998).

STUDY AIM:
Using data from a large sample of adoptive parents in the US, this study aims to present a systematic description of the role of infertility in couples’ decision to pursue an infant domestic adoption.

METHODS

◆ Participants
The EGDS is a prospective, longitudinal adoption study that follows families linked through nonrelative adoption.

N = 503 adoptive couples
Mean placement age = 6.19 days old (SD = 12.45)
Adoptive parents’ responses were collected when the adopted child was 9 months old.

Table 1. Adoptive Parents’ Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mother Report</th>
<th>Father Report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Black or African American = 3.9%</td>
<td>Black or African American = 6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic or Latinx = 17.6%</td>
<td>Hispanic or Latinx = 17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other = 18.4%</td>
<td>Other = 22.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Mean = 31.7, SD = 6.5</td>
<td>Mean = 31.9, SD = 6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Graduate Program Degree = 91.1%</td>
<td>Graduate Program Degree = 91.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-Year College or University Degree = 2.0%</td>
<td>4-Year College or University Degree = 2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trade School or High School Degree = 6.9%</td>
<td>Trade School or High School Degree = 6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income (USD)</td>
<td>Mean = 53100</td>
<td>Mean = 56000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption Type</td>
<td>Open Adoptive</td>
<td>Open Adoptive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Adoptive Parents’ Demographic Information

◆ Measures
Adoptive mothers and fathers independently responded to questions about the adoption process.

Reasons for pursuing an adoption plan:
Each participant reported reasons for pursuing an adoption plan, including infertility (See Figure 1 & 2).

Scale: 1 = not at all; 4 = a lot
Higher scores indicating a primary reason for adoption.

Impact of infertility:
Participants who reported fertility challenges rated how fertility issues affected their feelings and relationships.
Scale: 1 = not at all challenging; 5 = very challenging

RESULTS 1

◆ The majority of adoptive parents (80.1% mothers and 75.5% fathers) reported that they had decided to adopt a child because they were not able to have a child biologically.

◆ 59.8% of mothers and 40.6% of fathers rated infertility issues to be pretty or very challenging* (see Figure 3 & 5).

◆ 21.0% of mothers and 26.3% of fathers rated infertility being pretty or very challenging to their relationships (see Figure 4 & 6).

RESULTS 2

◆ Among various reasons of adoption, infertility is a primary aspect.

◆ Couples find fertility challenges emotionally stressful. However, fertility challenges do not affect couples’ relationships as much.

◆ Based on the importance of this issue, future adoption research should investigate how fertility challenges prior to adoption influence their attitudes and behaviors toward parenthood after the child joins the family.

CONCLUSIONS

QUESTIONS WE ASK

◆ How important is infertility in decision making to pursue adoption?
◆ How emotionally challenging is it for couples to go through infertility challenges?
◆ How does infertility impact couples’ relationships?

CONCLUSIONS

◆ Among various reasons of adoption, infertility is a primary aspect.

◆ Couples find fertility challenges emotionally stressful. However, fertility challenges do not affect couples’ relationships as much.

◆ Based on the importance of this issue, future adoption research should investigate how fertility challenges prior to adoption influence their attitudes and behaviors toward parenthood after the child joins the family.

This project was supported by grant R01 HD042608 from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health & Human Development and the National Institute on Drug Abuse, NIH, U.S. PHS (PI Years 1–5: David Reiss, MD; PI Years 6–10: Leslie Leve, Ph.D.), and grant R01 DA020585 from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the National Institute of Mental Health and OBSSR, NIH, U.S. PHS (PI: Jenae Neiderhiser, PhD). The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institute of Child Health & Human Development or the National Institutes of Health.

CONTACT

Misaki N. Natsuaki
University of California, Riverside
Email: natsuaki@ucr.edu

Jing Wang
University of California, Riverside
Email: jwang310@ucr.edu

Website: http://dtl.ucr.edu/index.html