

Experiences of involuntary childlessness during the COVID-19 pandemic



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BACKGROUND

The overall purpose is to investigate how COVID-19 pandemic has affected individuals who have been or are going through assessment or treatment for involuntary childlessness, and their processes of trying to have children. Previous research on involuntary childlessness in relation to the pandemic has mainly been medical and quantitative, and there has been a lack of qualitative studies that explore the subject area on a more in-depth level. The study is a project in ReproUnion, Challenge 5.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this qualitative study, we used semi-structured interviews to collect data. The study includes individuals who have been or are going through assessment or treatment for involuntary childlessness in Sweden and Denmark during the pandemic. Participants were recruited from both public and private care. 26 individuals took part in the study, of which 18 women and eight men. The participants were between 24 – 53 years old and the sample consisted of both heterosexual and same sex couples. The interviews addressed experiences of assessment and treatment of involuntary childlessness during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to e.g. access to care, socioeconomic factors and intimate relationships.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

The preliminary results show that the pandemic has affected the patients in many ways and made an already challenging process even more difficult. Obstacles mentioned are for example limit access to care with longer queues and uncertainty regarding when the treatment can be resumed. Many of the respondents has also suffered from the absence of partners during care visits. Furthermore, the fear of being infected by the Corona virus, which could cause the treatment to be postponed, has led to isolation and often a weaker support from family and friends. However, these negative consequences have affected patients to varying degrees, some worse than others. The results also show that the pandemic brought some positive consequences. For example, the isolation has been perceived as a relief for some as they easier could avoid being exposed to other people's pregnancies as well as attending baptisms and baby showers.

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"It has been extremely stressful for me to hear those messages [about delays of the treatment from the clinic], as it has taken so long to get started, and, yes, I am not getting any younger. That's how I feel. For every six months that goes by, I have kind of lost a chance to get pregnant."

"We are young and have no underlying health problems, but we still really had to isolate ourselves, and we were very afraid that we would catch a cold or suffer from Corona so that the treatments would be cancelled. So, it was all the time that you were afraid to meet people, and you were afraid to meet your friends"

"I think the biggest impact was that I was not allowed to accompany and that I was not allowed to participate, also in combination with this stress that you could get sick. That was probably the biggest impact for me and my wife."



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