

Lived Experiences of Women with Unexplained Infertility: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This ongoing PhD research examines the lived experiences of female patients with unexplained infertility through the lens of medical sociology. While infertility is defined within biomedicine as a disease with clear diagnostic criteria, a substantial proportion of patients receive no identifiable explanation for their „condition“. Therefore, unexplained infertility can be seen as a residual diagnostic category which does not offer an explanatory framework typical for the biomedical model, and, thus, has the potential to disrupt the standard biomedical understanding of the health and illness dichotomy. Situated in the Czech context, the research is designed as a qualitative study based primarily on in-depth interviews with women currently in the “diagnostic limbo” of unexplained infertility who are receiving care in assisted reproduction clinics or specialist practices. The interviews are currently being carried out. The project anticipates that unexplained infertility produces a state of diagnostic uncertainty that profoundly shapes patients’ self-identification in relation to health and illness, as well as the perceived legitimacy of the diagnosis and treatment strategies (such as IUI and IVF), while simultaneously reinforcing reliance on biomedical expertise and reproductive technologies. The analytical focus on women’s experiences reflects the fact that infertility diagnostics and treatment are predominantly directed at female bodies, and, thus, by foregrounding patients’ lived experiences, the project critically engages with biomedicine as a social authority and with normative pressures surrounding motherhood and female fertility. The findings may inform broader discussions on patient agency, as well as the optimization of (access to) care in cases of unexplained infertility.

Keywords: access to care, infertility, lived experience, unexplained infertility, women's health