Poster

# Searching for Infertility Information Online: Differences Between Men and Women

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# Abstract

**Background:** The Internet is an easily accessible source of medical information. People with stigmatized illnesses such as infertility often prefer to search for health-related information on the Internet; this is particularly true of men, who are in general less likely than women to seek help for medical problems and ask fewer questions and receive less information from health care providers. There has been limited research on the extent to which online resources are geared toward the information needs of men and women.

**Objective:** Differences between men and women in Internet searches about issues related to infertility and its treatment were examined, using data from an online survey of male and female fertility patients.

**Methods:** Patients seeking fertility care at four fertility clinics in Montreal and Toronto, Canada, were invited to participate in an anonymous online survey. Inclusion criteria included age 18 or over and the ability to answer survey questions in either English or French. Participants completed the survey either on an iPad at the time of recruitment or via a secure link, which was emailed to them. The survey included questions about whether the respondent had searched online for information about infertility, and which of a range of topics had been the subjects of an Internet search. Chi-square analysis was used to evaluate differences between male and female respondents.

**Results:** A total of 549 people, including 245 men (44.6%) and 304 women (55.4%), completed the survey. The average age of the participants was 36.5 years (SD=5.51). Time in treatment varied from first consultation to over 5 years of treatment. Most participants (87.9%) had searched the Internet for information about infertility, with women significantly more likely to report that they had done so (93.7% of women vs 80.3% of men, P<.001). Men and women were equally likely to search for information about causes of infertility, diagnostic tests, their own diagnosis, treatment options, and success rates. However, more women than men searched the scientific literature on infertility (88.4% vs 78.7%, P=.005), sought information about their own doctor (69.6% vs 49.2%, P<.001) as well as other fertility clinics (71.3% vs 56.5%, P=.001), and used the Internet to learn about the experience of other people with infertility concerns (70.7% vs 52.3%, P<.001).

**Conclusions:** The majority of fertility patients consulted the Internet for information. Previous research has indicated that women tend to see themselves as primarily responsible for obtaining information about infertility and its treatment. The results of the present study suggest that they use the Internet more than men to find such information, particularly as it pertains to treatment providers. Women may also be more inclined than men to seek social support via the Internet. Further study is required to determine whether male fertility patients have particular concerns and whether these are adequately addressed by available online resources.

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#### **IPROCEEDINGS**

## KEYWORDS

infertility; Internet search; gender differences

This poster was presented at the Connected Health Symposium 2016, October 20-21, Boston, MA, United States. The poster

is displayed as an image in Figure 1 and as a PDF in Multimedia Appendix 1.

#### Figure 1. Poster.

	<sup>1</sup> McGill University, <sup>2</sup>	Jewish Gen	ieral Hospita	l, <sup>s</sup> Lady Davis Institute, Montreal, Canada	
Introduction	Methods			Results	
<ul> <li>Anticipation of the inability of Canadian couples experience infertility. defined as "the inability to conceive following one year of unprotected intercourse".</li> <li>Infertility affects both men and women: one third of infertility is due to female factors, one ethild is due to make factors.</li> </ul>	Participants \$ 549 patients seeking fertility care in four clinics in Toronto and Montreal \$ surveys were completed in English (a2.8%) and French (37.2%) \$ Average age: 36.5 yeas (50-5.51 yrs.) \$ Median household income \$80,000 CDN Sample Characteristics			Online Heath Information searches by Fertility Patients Causes of infertility Treatment options Scientific Resaure Other clinics Other clinics Other sequencement with infertility	<ul> <li>Most participants (87.9%) h searched the internet for information about infertility</li> <li>Women and men differed significantly in how much th searched online (93.7% vs 80.3%).</li> </ul>
combination of both or unexplained.		N	%	Interpeting tests	,-
	Gender			My attending physician/team	Men and women were equally
Infertility patients suffer from impaired quality of life including diminished mental and	Female Male	304 245	55.4 44.6	Provincial Healthcare	likely to search for:
physical health, feelings of loss of control and	Used the internet for OHI	482	87.9	Private Healthcare	✓ causes of infertility
social stigma.	Born in Canada	287	52.4	How to discuss with family/friends	✓ treatment options
	Education (highest level achieved)			Surrogacy	✓ surrogacy
	High school	35	6.4	How to find peer support	<ul> <li>interpreting results</li> </ul>
Online Health Information (OHI) searches	Technical college	99	18.1		how to discuss with fam and friends
<ul> <li>There is a growing use of the Internet for</li> </ul>	University undergraduate	219	40.0		✓ health care coverage
health information and support.	Post Graduate Degree	119	21.8	Women Men	
<ul> <li>People with stigmatized illnesses tend to use</li> </ul>	Time in treatment			93.7 •• 88.4	
the internet to look for health related	under 1 year 1 year to 2 years	334 128	61.4 23.5	80.3 78.7 71.3 69.6 70.7	Men and women differed i
information.	3 to 5 years	59	10.8	56.5 52.	their OHI search for:
	over 5 years	23	4.2		> scientific literature
<ul> <li>Men are less likely than women to seek help for medical problems; they are likely to ask</li> </ul>	Diagnosis				> other fertility clinics
fewer questions and receive less information	Female factor infertility	187	34.1		➤ their own doctor
from health care providers.	Male factor infertility	178	32.4		the lived experience of
	Unexplained	99	18.0		others with infertility
<ul> <li>There has been limited research on the</li> </ul>	Both female and male	42	7.7		
extent to which online resources are geared				** pe-0.01	
towards the information needs of men and women.	Procedure			***********	
women.	<ul> <li>Participants were approached in clir</li> </ul>				
	asked to fill out a self report survey emailed a link to a secure website to			Discussion & Conclusic	ons
Objective	phones or at a later date. Data were	collected anon	ymously.		
<ul> <li>To examine the differences between men and women in Internet searches concerning issues</li> </ul>			<ul> <li>Previous research has indicated that women see themselves as primarily about infertility and its treatment. The results of the present study sugge than men to find such information, particularly as it pertains to treatment</li> </ul>	est that they use the internet more	
related to infertility and its treatment.	Chi square analysis was used to evaluate differences between male and female respondents.			Women may also be more inclined than men to seek social support via the Internet. However, this study reveals that many men also search for the experience of others online.	

# **Multimedia Appendix 1**

Poster.

[PDF File (Adobe PDF File), 685KB-Multimedia Appendix 1]

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