

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.

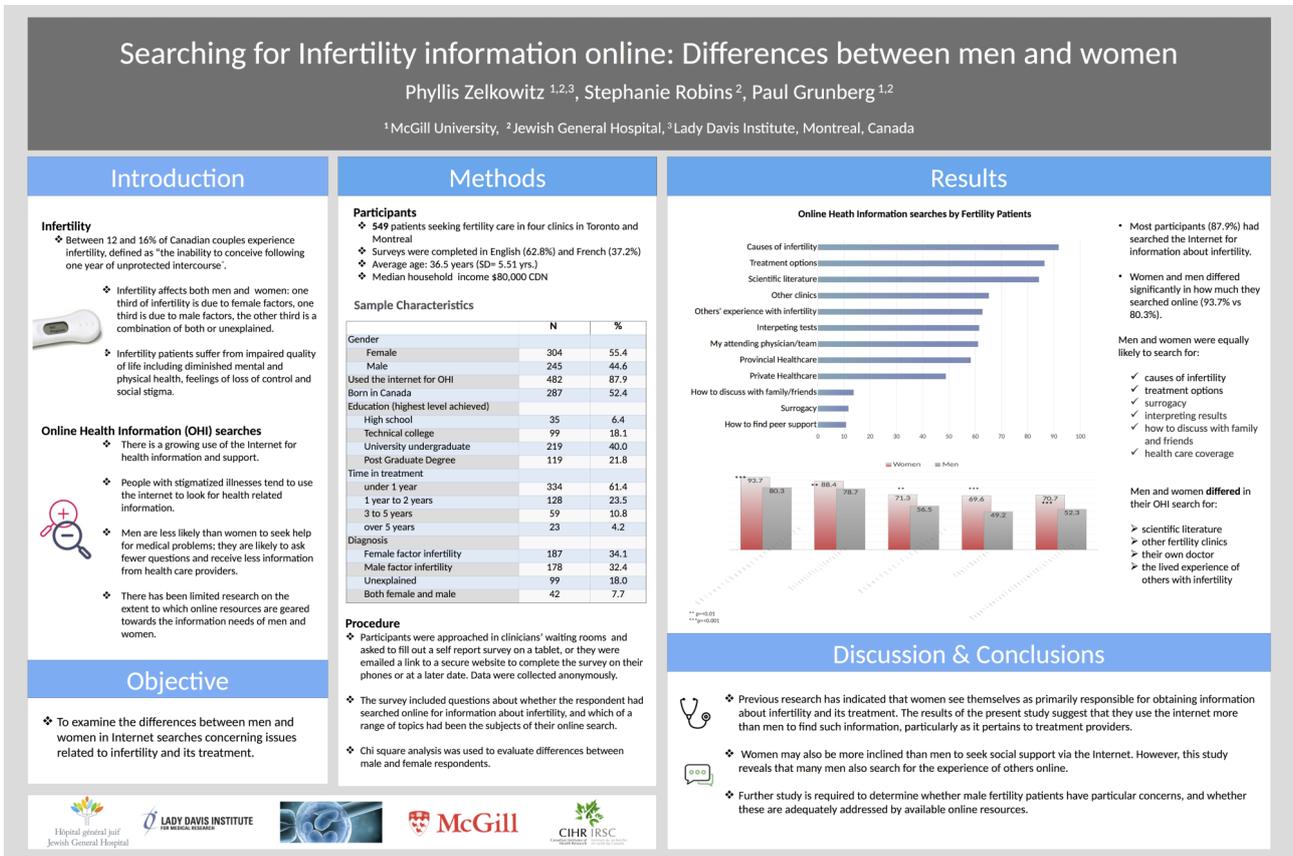
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**KEYWORDS**

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.



**Multimedia Appendix 1**

Poster.

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

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