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Systematic review to examine the association between female infertility and common mental disorders

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Background: Infertility is a global health issue in both developed and developing countries. The estimates of people going through infertility worldwide is as high as 48.5 million couples worldwide. Although male factor infertility accounts for more than half of global cases of childlessness, infertility remains a burden often put on most women in many societies. Female infertility is diagnosed as a medical condition, but its enormous impact on social and psychological functioning on those experiencing it, cannot be overemphasized.

Methods: A thorough search was conducted in MEDLINE, EMBASE, PSYCHINFO and CINAHL databases using key word searches female, infertility, sub-fertility, mental health, anxiety and depression. Screening of the included studies and also of studies that cited included studies, with subsequent quality appraisal, data extraction and final analysis and synthesis of the data.

Results: This review included eighty-three studies in its final analysis. Almost ninety percent of the studies reviewed reported a significant association between female infertility and anxiety and depression. Reports from one population study found that levels of anxiety and depression in infertile women, were comparable to that of the general population. Sociodemographic factors including increased age, no or low education, low or no employment were significantly associated with higher levels of anxiety and depression. In some regions, anxiety and depression was significantly associated with lack of husband's support.

Conclusions: There is substantial evidence to indicate that female infertility is significantly associated with common mental disorders, in particular, anxiety and depression. Majority of studies included were cross-sectional, which limits inference on the direction of causality.

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