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## Parenthood and separation in couples 6 years after their first infertility consultation



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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To evaluate the percentage of couples achieving parenthood and the rate of separation 6 years after their first consultation for infertility.

**Study design:** Epidemiological study in the reproductive medicine department of a French university hospital. All first consulting couples (FCC) who had their first infertility consultation in the department in 2007 were contacted by phone and asked to respond to a questionnaire concerning their infertility treatments, parenthood and marital status 6 years after their first consultation.

**Results:** Of the 685 FCC, 94 could not be contacted, 34 refused to respond and 557 (86%) answered the questionnaire. Of 557 FCC who have responded, 361 (65%) have achieved parenthood: 166 (46%) after treatment, 98 (27%) after spontaneous conception, 38 (11%) after both spontaneous and treatment-induced conception and 59 (16%) through adoption. Parenthood was not influenced either by the causes or duration of infertility. Separation occurred in 53 (9.5%) of FCC, mainly in those without any children (28% vs 4% in FCC with at least one child;  $P < .0001$ ).

**Conclusion:** Six years after their primary consultation, 25% of couples remained childless and 28% of them were separated.

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### Introduction

From 5% to 15% of young couples consult for infertility at least once [1–4]. Even though the results of assisted reproductive technologies (ART) are well known thanks to regularly published registers [5–7], little is known about parenthood and separation of couples several years after infertility consultation in an unselected population. Among infertile couples, some will achieve pregnancy spontaneously, some through medically assisted reproduction (MAR), some will adopt children and some will give up their parenthood project and have no further contact with the infertility center. Most studies, whether investigating delivery rates [8,9] or treatment discontinuation rates [10–12], have focused on couples included in an ART or MAR program. It is therefore difficult to gain

a precise idea of the true proportion of couples who have a child after a history of infertility. Moreover, infertility and its treatments are a chronic stressor which has a psychological impact on the quality of life [13,14] and can affect marital adjustment and sexual function [15], thus possibly leading to separation [16].

The aim of the present study was to evaluate, in an unselected population of infertile couples consulting in reproductive medicine center, parenthood and risk of separation 6 years after the first infertility consultation, regardless of the causes and treatments of infertility.

### Materials and methods

#### Participants

All 685 first consulting couples (FCC) who were referred to our infertility center for the first time from 1 January to 31 December 2007 were contacted by phone in 2013, i.e. 6 years after the first consultation. Either women or men were interviewed according to the phone number registered in our database. The interviews

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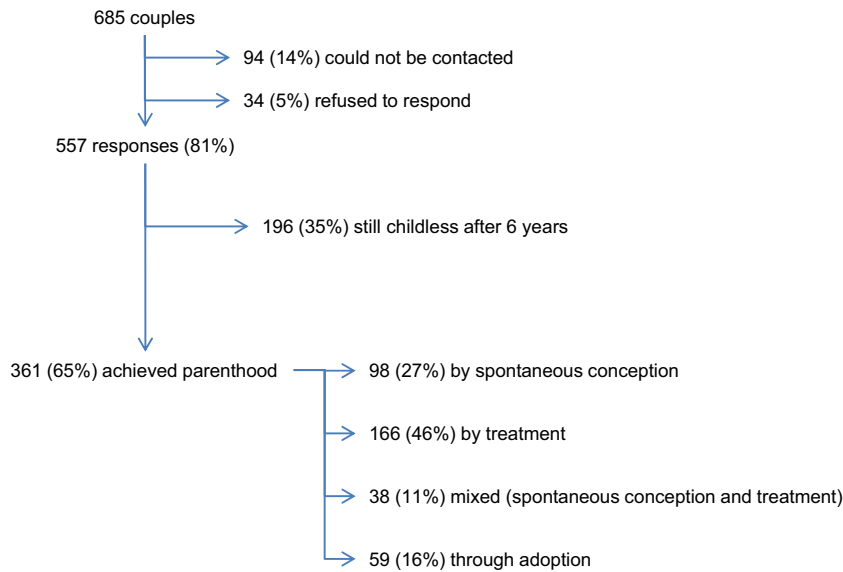


Fig. 1. Flow chart of patients' outcome.

were carried out by a resident gynecologist (MF or ETS) using a questionnaire asking FCC about the type of treatment they had received since their first consultation, their parenthood and how it was achieved, and their marital status. We were unable to contact 94 FCC (changes in address or phone number) and 34 refused to respond to the questionnaire. A total of 557 FCC (86%) agreed to respond (Fig. 1).

Before consulting at our center, 154 (28%) already had at least one child together, 19 (3%) had children separately but not together, 45 (8%) women had children but their husbands did not, 33 (6%) men had children but their wives did not, and 306 (55%) couples had no children either together or separately.

The origin of infertility could not be determined in 31 FCC (6%) due to spontaneous pregnancy or drop-out before infertility examinations. As shown in Fig. 2, among the 526 diagnoses, the origin was female in 208 (40%) cases (93 ovulatory, 56 tubal, 33 endometriosis, 26 cervical), male in 199 (38%) cases (160

oligoasthenospermia, 23 azoospermia, 16 other male causes (six anti-sperm antibodies, four sperm cryopreservation before cancer treatment, six ejaculation dysfunctions), mixed (female and male) in 27 (5%) cases and unexplained in 92 (17%) cases.

#### Questionnaire

The questionnaire concerned spontaneous and treatment-induced parenthood achieved after discontinuing treatment in our center, as well as participants' current marital status. The other data (infertility examinations, results of treatments in our unit) were extracted from the electronic medical records of our hospital.

#### Statistical analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using Statview software. Data are means  $\pm$  SD. Comparisons of percentages were done using the  $\chi^2$  test and means were compared using the Student *t* test or Mann–Whitney test according to the distribution of variables.

The study was approved by the ethical committee for clinical research of Toulouse University Hospital (n° 10-0214).

## Results

### Parenthood

Six years after their first infertility consultation, 361 (65%) participants had become parents: 98 (27%) by spontaneous conception, 166 (46%) after infertility treatment, 38 (11%) after both spontaneous and treatment-induced conceptions and 59 (16%) through adoption. As shown in Table 1, the duration of infertility at the time of consultation had no significant effect on the rate of spontaneous parenthood, which was as high as 21% after more than 6 years of infertility. However, the rate of treatment-parenthood significantly decreased as infertility duration increased (47% for a duration of less than 19 months vs 17% for more than 77 months;  $P < 0.01$ ) but women from FCC with a long infertility duration were significantly older ( $31.7 \pm 5.1$  for less than 19 months vs  $35.1 \pm 3.6$  for more than 77 months;  $P < 0.001$ ). It should be noted that the time to achievement of parenthood after consultation did not increase with infertility duration. Six years after their first consultation, 103 FCC (18.5%) were still involved in an MAR program and 71 of these (69%) were trying to have a second child.

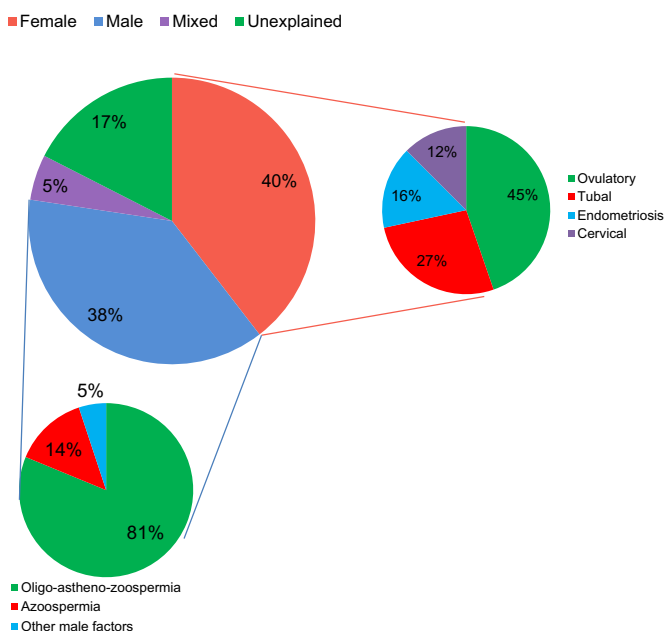


Fig. 2. Distribution of infertility causes in the study population.

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