



Developing an evidence-based and patient-informed psychological intervention for infertility-related distress

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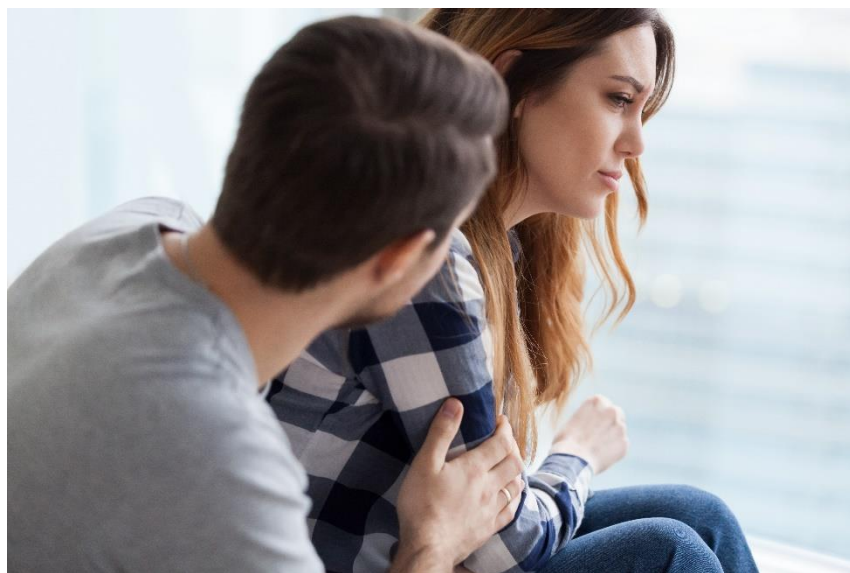
Infertility

- 1 in 6 reproductive-aged couples experience infertility¹
- Women bear the brunt of the physical burden
 - Cycle monitoring
 - Near-daily ultrasounds
 - Daily self-injections
 - Etc.



¹Bushnik et al. *Human Reproduction*, 28(4), 1151.

Infertility-Related Distress



- Women with infertility are at high risk of mental health problems
 - 1 in 3 women with infertility develops clinical anxiety or depression¹
 - Quality of life is comparable to that of cancer patients²

¹Volgsten et al. (2008). *Hum Reprod*, 23(9), 2056-63. ²Domar, et al. (1993). *J Psychosom Obstet Gynaecol*, 14 Suppl, 45-52.



Psychological Interventions for Infertility

- Meta-analyses suggest that psychological interventions for infertility are lacking^{1,2}
 - Small improvement in anxiety
 - No improvement in depressive symptoms, distress, or marital functioning
 - Authors recommend the development of a new intervention

¹Frederiksen et al. (2015), *BMJ Open*, 5(1), e006592. ²Ying et al. (2016). *J Assist Reprod Genet*, 33(6), 689-701.

A New Approach

- Rather than minimally tailor a pre-existing therapy...
- Identify therapeutic interventions that directly map onto components of infertility-related distress

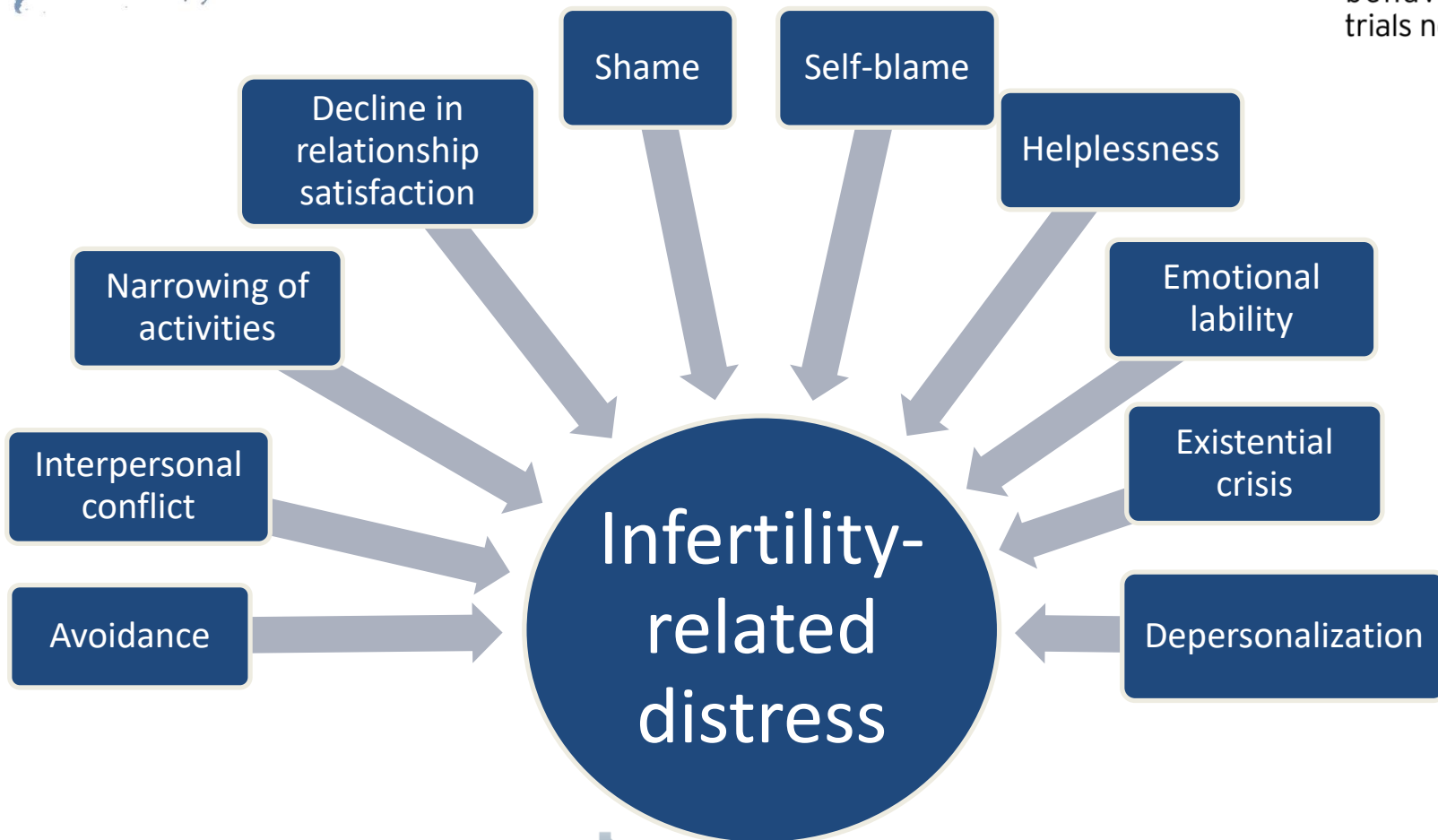




Step 1: Identify components of infertility-related distress

- Conducted semi-structured interviews focused on the specific psychological challenges associated with infertility
 - 25 women with infertility
 - 15 mental health professionals specializing in this population

Step 1: Results





Step 2: The Delphi Method

- Recruit 15 experts to brainstorm possible therapy components
- Send the finalised list for feedback
 - Clinical psychologists
 - Reproductive health professionals
 - Women with infertility
- Back-and-forth until consensus is achieved
- Also ask about preferred intervention format



Step 2: The Delphi Method

Technique	Description	Clinical target(s)	Helpfulness (0-10)	Include next round?	Suggested changes?
Values clarification & committed action	The therapist helps the person clarify the things that they hold personally meaningful and use this information to help set goals and take actions that enrich the person's life.	-Avoidance -Narrowed activities -Existential crisis			



Step 3: Consensus Meeting

- Consensus meeting to finalise the list of intervention components
 - Research team
 - Women's health nurse practitioner
 - Infertility research advisory panel
- Develop the intervention, send for feedback and have a 2nd meeting



Step 4: Pilot the intervention

- Recruit 20 women with infertility to undergo the intervention
 - Outcomes pre and post
 - Audio-recording and review of sessions
 - Feedback session with participants
 - Incorporate feedback
- Apply for funding for a larger trial



Infertility Research Advisory Panel



- Six women from the community with infertility
- Bi-monthly meetings with the research team
 - Discuss progress
 - Receive feedback on specific items
 - Brainstorm knowledge translation strategies, side project ideas



Complimentary Side Projects

- Longitudinal studies of daily coping and infertility-related distress^{1,2}
- Systematic review of current interventions³
- Coping with cancelled fertility treatments due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Knowledge translation campaign

¹Chernoff et al. (in press). *Arch Women Ment. Health*; ²Dube et al. (in press). *Psychosom Med*; ³Bright et al. (in press). *BMJ Open*



Long-Term Goals



- Improve our knowledge of the psychology of infertility
- Improve access to effective infertility-specific mental health resources
- Facilitate training among clinicians



Thank You!

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- Advisory Panel members
- Collaborators
 - Amanda Scollan
 - Dr. Corrine Jabs
- Trainees
 - Ashley Balsom
 - Loveness Dube



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