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Abstract: Emotional Vulnerabilities in Women Diagnosed with Infertility

Women diagnosed with infertility have reported difficulties with both relational and sexual functioning. Emotional vulnerabilities may help explain the underlying mechanism of this relationship. Women (N = 35) attending their first appointment at the Vermont Center for Reproductive Medicine at Fletcher Allen were recruited to complete a series of psychometric measures. Emotional vulnerabilities were operationalized as anxiety sensitivity, the tendency to misinterpret benign physical sensation, emotional dysregulation, and the inability to adapt and regulate emotions. Emotional vulnerabilities were measured by both the Difficulties in Emotional Regulations Scale (DERS) and Anxiety Sensitivity Index (ASI), relational functioning was measured using the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), and sexual functioning was assessed using the Females Sexual Functioning Index (FSFI). Findings showed a significant negative correlation of dyadic satisfaction with anxiety sensitivity $r(35) = -.338$, $p = .047$ and with emotional regulation $r(30) = -.621$, $p < .01$. Findings showed a significant negative correlation between emotional regulation and sexual desire $r(29) = -.422$, $p = .023$. Additionally, there was a significant negative correlation between sexual desire specifically and anxiety sensitivity $r(33) = -.423$, $p = .014$. Overall sexual functioning was positively correlated with both relational affectional expression $r(34) = .484$, $p = .004$ and relational cohesion (sharing positive emotional connections with each other) $r(34) = .452$, $p = .007$. This study demonstrates the role of emotional vulnerabilities in both relational and sexual functioning in women seeking reproductive care. These findings may speak to the importance of being able to cope with stressors. Infertility, a major life stressor, appears to have particularly negative repercussions on the relationship well-being for individuals who have difficulties regulating their emotions. Fortunately, acceptance base psychotherapies are efficacious at increasing emotion regulation skills and thus can be an effective tool for clients receiving infertility treatment and experiencing high levels of relational distress.