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A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOSOMATIC STUDY OF INFERTILE MARRIAGES

BY

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THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MEDICINE
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE, BASED ON WORK CARRIED
OUT IN THE DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

SUBMITTED IN APRIL, 1970

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SUMMARY

The literature on the psychological aspects of infertility was reviewed. A wide variety of hypotheses have been presented to explain psychogenic infertility, particularly during the last 30 years. These have included behavioural abnormalities affecting the mechanics of coitus, as well as psychosomatic disturbances affecting the various physiological processes necessary for conception. Most of these studies have been based on the detailed psychological study of small numbers of infertile women. Only more recently have some larger-scale clinical studies been reported, and these have given conflicting results. Some have confirmed, others refuted the relevance of psychopathological factors to infertility.

The literature in related fields was also reviewed. These were: the clinical assessment and follow-up studies of infertile couples; the influence of adoption on infertility; the psychology of artificial insemination; and the fertility of psychotics and neurotics. An attempt was made to draw some relevant conclusions from the literature in each of these areas.

The hypotheses being examined in the present survey and the theoretical and clinical considerations which led to their development were outlined. The hypotheses were that both female and male partners of infertile marriages would be more likely to show psychiatric disturbances, and disturbances of sexual orientation

and behaviour than fertile women and men. The experiment designed to test these hypotheses was described in detail. A semi-structured interview and a psychological test (the Neuroticism Scale Questionnaire or "N.S.Q.") were used as parameters.

Statistical analysis of the results showed that there was a significant tendency for more infertile women to have a psychiatric diagnosis than fertile women. However, this tendency occurred only in the category "Personality disorder", not in the categories of neurosis and psychosis. Infertile women showed a significantly increased tendency to suffer disturbances of psychosexual orientation and behaviour. It was not clear from the present survey whether these caused or resulted from the infertility. The infertile couples also showed a greater disparity in their statements regarding the frequency of intercourse than did the fertile couples. This observation has not been described previously in the literature. With reference to the males, there was a significant tendency for the fathers of the ^{ih} fertile men to be younger than the fathers of the ■ fertile men. No significant differences were found between the groups on any of the five N.S.Q. scales.

The results of this survey show that although most women react adversely to their childlessness, "psychogenic infertility" as such is uncommon. They suggest that when either a woman or a man has psychopathological motives for avoiding conception, these tend to be mediated by behavioural rather than by psychosomatic mechanisms.

The interpretation of these results is discussed and evaluated.