Sterilization in the childfree population: an exploratory study

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Background

- Female sterilization is the most common method of contraception in the US1
- Between 1909-1979, there were 60,000 forcible sterilizations in government-organized programs2
- In the 1970s, ob-gyns followed a "120 rule" = age multiplied by parity = 120 before sterilization was appropriate (ie. 30 yo x 4 children = 120)3
- Regret in women who had a tubal sterilization from 1978-1987 was lowest among women who had no previous births (30 or younger: 6.3%; >50yo: 5.4%) (CREST)4
- There is a large community of people who are childfree by choice and would likely not regret sterilization
- Reddit/r/childfree has 1.5 million members worldwide4
- Users report multiple barriers to obtaining a sterilization, including physician refusal due to age or perceived risk of regret4

Objectives:

- To describe the childfree population seeking sterilization
- To identify reasons childfree people seek sterilization
- To identify barriers to receiving surgical sterilization
- To characterize the incidence of regret in the sterilized childfree population

Methods

- REDCap survey
- Advertised on Reddit, TikTok, Facebook, Twitter
- Participants were ages 18 or older, live in the US, have no biological children, and have sought or are seeking surgical sterilization

Results

- 403 participants completed the survey:
  - 153 (38%) were sterilized
  - 44 (11%) were approved for a procedure
  - 32 (8%) had been unable to find a doctor to do the procedure
  - 83 (21%) were seeking a doctor
  - 91 (22%) had not yet sought a doctor

- Participants were:
  - Predominantly younger (ages 18-24: 26%, ages 25-29: 31%, ages 30-34: 24%, ages 35-39: 14%, 40 or older: 5%)
  - Mostly white (White 88%, Black/African-American 6%, American Indian/Alaskan Native 3%, Asian 5%, Other 5%)
  - Diverse in marital status (single 40%, married 31%, divorced 4%, engaged 3%, long term relationship 21%)
  - Predominantly privately insured (private 75%, public 20%, uninsured 3%)

Reasons for seeking sterilization (n=403)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do not want children</td>
<td>378 (94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood trauma</td>
<td>111 (28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current state of the world</td>
<td>267 (66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental (ie. overpopulation)</td>
<td>232 (58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>237 (59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not want to parent</td>
<td>336 (83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical reasons</td>
<td>129 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral reasons</td>
<td>145 (36)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fear of pregnancy and/or childbirth</td>
<td>277 (69)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked about regret, sterilized participants (n=149) responded in the following ways:

- 99% said "yes" to "At the time of your surgery, did you think sterilization was a good choice for you?"
- 98% said "no" to "Have you ever experienced regret for your decision to get sterilized?"
- 100% said "no" to "Have you considered getting your sterilization reversed?"

Conclusions and Next Steps

- Childfree individuals have a variety of reasons for seeking sterilization and may be at a lower risk of regret than parous people who are sterilized
- Share results with the childfree community
- Use open REDCap registry for future research
- A note on language: the authors have chosen to use the terms "sterilization" and "sterilized" as these are the terms used by the childfree community at present

References