

The ability to have a baby is evolution's way of apologizing for the inconvenience that comes with being female; menstrual cramps, midnight tampon runs, annual pap smears, menopause, saggy breasts, stretch marks, "extra energy" (i.e. large buttocks and wide hips) for bearing children...

Obviously, women more than earn the privilege of producing beautiful bundles of joy with perfect piggies, long eyelashes and satin skin. Having the opportunity to coo, snuggle, kiss, baby talk and buy ridiculous amounts of precious infant attire is only fair after nine months of swollen ankles and hourly urgent potty runs, 12 hours of labor and crotch stitching that takes weeks to heal.

But what about the women whose bodies deny them the payback they're due? Infertility can be a devastating reality for many women. The expectation of having children, being pregnant, starting a family, shopping for maternity clothes, experiencing ultrasounds and buying diaper genies are all dreams of many women. Struggling to make such dreams come true, often for years, takes a substantial toll on the mental health of the dreamer.

Grieving over the loss of reproductive ability is normal for any individual or couple wanting to have children. Coping with this loss and coming to some degree of acceptance is an important part of the mother's healing. Failure to adjust to this loss increases the risk for developing a psychiatric mood disorder.

According to a study conducted in Sweden involving over 500 couples, depressive disorders were diagnosed in 26 percent of the female participants entering services for in vitro fertilization. Ten percent met criteria for a major depressive disorder. These percentages increased following failed attempts at IVF.

More interesting however, was that of the 500-some couples, only 20 percent of those who met criteria for a psychiatric illness were receiving mental health treatment. Not surprisingly then, women who suffered from depression upon entering in vitro services were significantly more likely to discontinue the service following the first failed attempt at IVF.

Psychobabble

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If you are part of the support system for a couple or woman who is struggling with infertility, be open to witnessing the symptoms of depression that often accompany the struggle. Providing emotional support and encouraging the use of therapy to treat symptoms of depressed mood, sleep disturbance, feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness, appetite changes, loss of interest in pleasurable activities, difficulty concentrating and increased thoughts of death and/or dying, are just some ways that you can aid your friend during their struggle.