

ABSTRACT

THE CONSEQUENCES OF INFERTILITY: A FOCUS ON SELF
CONCEPT MEASUREMENT IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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The study is set in the Caribbean encompassing Dominica, Jamaica, St Vincent and the Grenadines and Suriname. It examines the experience of infertility in a select group of women, measures the consequences, if any, on the self concept and explores a new dynamic for social work treatment.

The methodology utilizes a combination of psychological scales and survey-type questionnaires, with a total sample of 161 women (73 fertile, 88 infertile). Interviews were conducted at either a family planning clinic or at home among women who were either actively seeking help (infertiles) or were associated with the clinic due to a previous gynaecological problem (fertiles).

The general Self Concept factor of the Infertile woman of the region showed no marked difference from that of the fertile woman. However, on holding

specific traditionally significant variables constant, it manifested in a 'covert' form as significantly lower than that of the fertile woman. These variables were: 'willingness to adopt when the spouse had proven fertile' and 'the possibility of bearing a child'. Also significantly associated with self concept configuration were the variables of 'length of union' (where the self concept began to show signs of deterioration as futile cohabitation became extended) and 'positive feelings of competence' (where the self concept improved as the Infertile woman appeared to have satisfactorily applied her educational competence to some occupational activity).

The study identifies personality strengths and weaknesses of the Infertile woman presenting to the Casework discipline both content and method for effecting a new treatment approach to a woman determined to come to grips with the culturally dissonant reality of childlessness.