



A study funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC), IVFAustralia and Melbourne IVF

PATPA Participant Newsletter, March, 2010

In Australia and throughout the Western world there is a trend for couples to delay parenthood. The Parental Age and Transition to Parenthood Australia (PATPA) study conducted in NSW and Victoria and funded by grants from the Australian Research Council (ARC), IVF Australia and Melbourne IVF, aims to provide contemporary Australian evidence on the experience of first-time pregnancy and parenthood. The findings from this study will help inform policy and services so that they can better support Australian families, both with planning and rearing children.

The PATPA study investigates physical health, psychological wellbeing, and work, family and social considerations in late pregnancy and four months after the birth of a first baby. In this newsletter we report on the progress of the study and describe what we have found so far. As we continue to analyse the data we will use newsletters to keep all of you who kindly participated updated on the findings of the study

Who are the participants?

We recruited 793 women from hospital antenatal clinics, antenatal classes and IVF clinics in Sydney and Melbourne. Of these 619 completed interviews and questionnaires in late pregnancy and 568 women also generously shared their experiences when their babies were 4 months old. The oldest baby in the study is now two years of age, and the youngest just 7 months old.

We recruited relatively even numbers of women in three age-groups, 189 women aged 20-30 years; 222 women aged between 31 and 36; and 205 women aged 37 years or older. The need for medical assistance to conceive increases with age and a unique contribution of the PATPA study is the inclusion of couples who conceived spontaneously and with assisted reproductive technology (ART). Approximately half the women in the study had conceived spontaneously and the other half had conceived with ART.

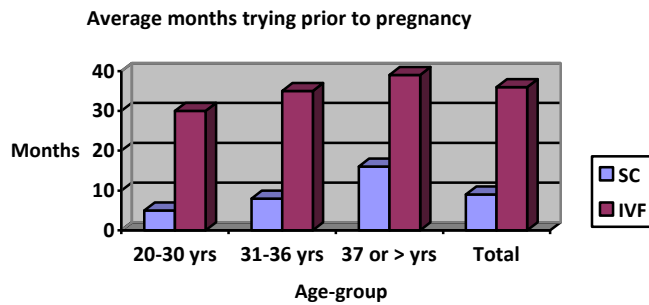
To find out if and how age and the use of ART might affect the experience of pregnancy and transition to parenthood we looked for differences and similarities between the three age-groups and we also compared the responses from participants who had conceived spontaneously with those who had conceived with ART.

In this newsletter we summarise what participants told us in late pregnancy about the context of their pregnancy - how they were preparing for the birth and planning to feed their baby, how many more children they were hoping to have and what their work and family circumstances were. In the presentation of the results we compare responses from the three age-groups and responses from women conceiving spontaneously (hereafter called the SC group) and with ART (hereafter called the ART group).

Pregnancy History

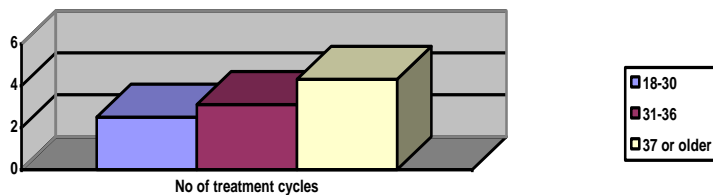
Women were asked how long they had been trying to fall pregnant and whether they had experienced pregnancy loss in the past. Not surprisingly spontaneously conceiving women spent a shorter time trying than women conceiving through ART (on average 9 months versus 36 months, **see Figure 1**). In the SC group, the youngest women (aged 30 or younger) were more likely than women in the two older age groups to report that the pregnancy was unexpected.

Figure 1 Average time (months) to fall pregnant



For both SC and ART groups, the time to fall pregnant increased with age. Among women conceiving through ART, women in the older age- groups needed more treatment cycles than those in the younger age-group before falling pregnant (**see Figure 2**).

Figure 2 Age and average number of treatment cycles (including stimulated and frozen embryo transfer cycles) before falling pregnant



About one woman in four (26%) had experienced a previous pregnancy loss and 14% a termination. Women in the ART group were more likely than those in the SC group to have experienced pregnancy loss (31% versus 20%). Age-groups also differed with 18%, 23% and 36%, of younger, middle and older women respectively, reporting previous pregnancy loss. There were also age-group differences for terminations, with 9%, 12% and 22%, respectively in the three age groups having had a termination.

Couple Relationship

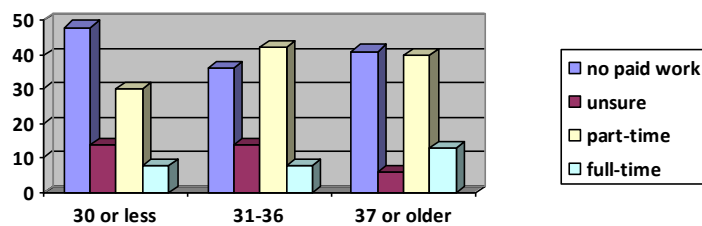
The majority of women (79%) were married, 17% were in a de facto relationship, 1% had a same sex partner, 3% were single and one woman was widowed. Women in the ART group were more likely than those in the SC group to be married (82% versus 75%). A lower proportion of women in the oldest age-group were married (69%) compared with women in the middle (84%) and youngest (82%) age-groups. About one quarter of women had been married before and this was more common among women in the oldest age-group where 40% had a previous marriage, compared with 22% in the middle and 7% in the youngest age-groups. One quarter of the partners had also been married before. A few women (6%) had partners with children from a previous relationship and this was more common among women in the oldest age-group (10% versus 6% and 2% for women in the middle and youngest age-groups, respectively). The time spent in the current relationship was on average 5 years for women in the youngest age-group, 6.5 years for women in the middle age-group and 8.5 years for women in the oldest age-group.

Work and Family Plans

At 30 weeks of pregnancy 62% of women were in full-time paid employment, 14% were employed part-time and 24% were not in paid employment. There were no age-group differences in employment status, but women conceiving with ART were less likely to be in paid employment (70%) than women in the SC group (83%). The average time at which women intended to stop working was 34 weeks of pregnancy and this was the same across the three age-groups.

We asked women about their plans for resuming paid work in the first year after the birth. Women in the youngest age-group were least likely and women in the oldest age group most likely to plan to resume work after the baby was born although this represented only a small number (13%) of women (**Figure 3**). There was a trend towards an age-group difference in timing of return to work. Women in the youngest age-group planned (on average) to return to work when their baby was 10 months old, while women in their early to mid thirties planned to go back when their baby was 7 months and those in the oldest age-group when their baby was 6 months old. **See Figure 3.**

Figure 3 Work plans for the first year after the birth according to age-group

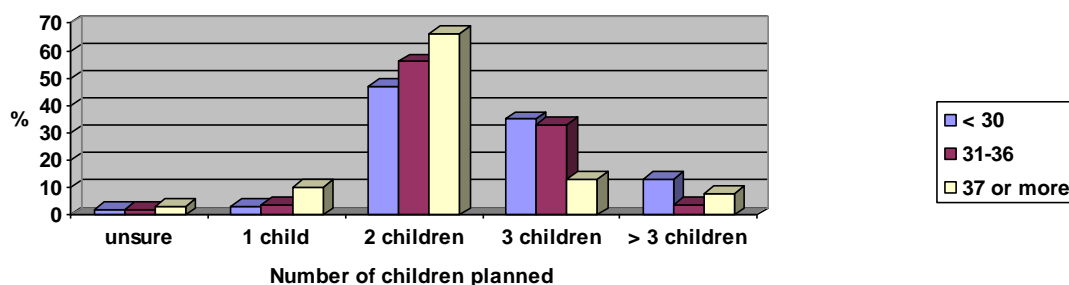


Although the majority of couples (94%) planned that the mother would be the primary caregiver, older parents were more likely than those in the younger two age-groups to plan to share the care of the baby equally or almost equally (9% of women in the oldest age-group versus 4% in the other two age-groups). Twenty percent of mothers had access to and planned to take paid maternity leave, and interestingly, 21% of fathers planned to take paid paternity leave.

Birth, Baby Feeding, and Family Size Plans

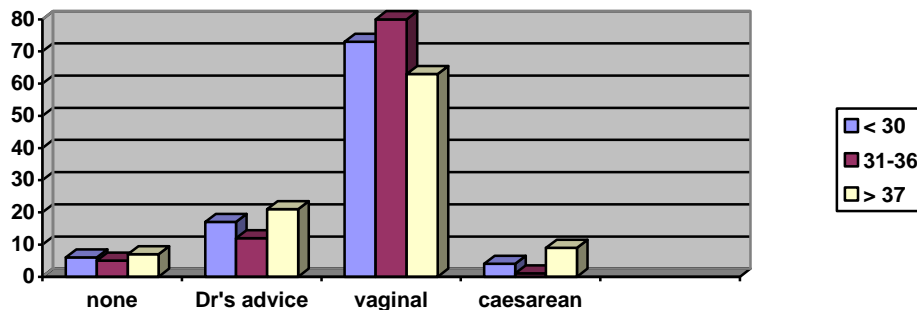
There were age-group differences, but no mode of conception differences in participants' responses to a question about "ideal family size". Very few couples (6%) planned just one child, 57% planned two, 27% three and 8% were hoping to have more than three children. **As Figure 4** illustrates, older parents generally planned smaller families.

Figure 4 "Ideal family size" according to age-group



We asked women about their preferences for the birth. Most women (73%) indicated a preference for a vaginal birth and a small proportion (5%) a preference for a caesarean birth. Some women (16%) said that they would do what their doctor suggested and a few (6%) expressed no preference. There were age-group differences and differences between the SC and ART groups. Women in the oldest age-group were most likely to indicate that they would do whatever their doctor suggested and more likely than women in the younger age-groups to prefer a caesarean birth (9% versus 1% and 3% in middle and youngest age-groups, respectively, **see Figure 5**). Women in the ART group were also more likely to express a preference for a caesarean birth (8% versus 2% of women in the SC group).

Figure 5 Preferences regarding the birth according to age-group



Almost all women (97%) intended to breastfeed their baby and there were no age or mode of conception group differences. Nor were there differences in how long women were planning to breastfeed their baby with each age-group intending to breastfeed for about eight months.

Plans for Data Analysis and Dissemination of Results.

This is a very brief summary of what the PATPA study found in relation to the context of pregnancy and participants' expectations in late pregnancy of the birth, infant feeding, ideal family size and return to paid employment. Once we analyse the postnatal data, we will be in a position to see how expectations match up with experiences and also to explore more fully adjustment both during pregnancy and after the baby is born. In 2010 we hope to submit papers from the PATPA study for publication in scientific journals. We plan to report on physical and psychological wellbeing during pregnancy and after the birth; birth and breastfeeding expectations and outcomes; and the health, behaviour and temperament of the newborns. We also plan to explore how adjustment in pregnancy is related to wellbeing in after the birth and the factors that influence wellbeing during pregnancy and after the birth. We will keep PATPA participants informed as these papers are published.

PATPA Toddler Follow-Up.

A large number of participants (more than 90%) expressed interest in a follow-up. We are hoping to contact those participants during 2010-2011 to invite them to participate in an interview regarding their experiences of parenting when their first-born child is around 18 months old.