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Oral Presentations

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The experience and needs of puerperal women who have had a child following assisted reproductive technologies (ART): A qualitative study

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Background: There is a steadily increasing number of newborns born following assisted reproductive technologies (ART), in Europe. Women who became pregnant ART in the Netherlands are under the care of a primary midwife. It is known that during pregnancy, these formal infertile women might have specific experiences such as anxiety and insecurity and paradoxical needs in maternity care. Little is known about how they experience the first few weeks after birth (puerperium).

Objective: The aim of this research is to investigate how women who have had a child after ART experience puerperium and what care needs these women have.

Materials and Methods: From 2017 till 2020, we interviewed sixteen women who had

a child after fertility treatment by in vitro fertilization or intracytoplasmic sperm injection. This explorative, qualitative study was based on the constructivist paradigm, using a comparison/grounded theory design.

Results: The three themes that emerged from the analysis were 1) the puerperal woman, 2) the caregiver and 3) parenting. The main need of the puerperal women was to be able to talk about their experiences “when the baby arrived, I just couldn't believe it was my child”. From the care provider, they needed understanding “She only had to say one sentence ‘so I know it's different for you’ coordinated information and continuity of care. The processes that underlie this are the transition to parenthood, insecurities “Oh I think it's all scary”, the unreality “I never learned how to take care of a child because I did not believe that a child would come” and gratitude in having a child.

Conclusion: Fertility treatment and the additional uncertainties are mentioned as reasons whether or not to prepare for the puerperium and to have little expectations regarding puerperium. It is important for care providers to be aware of the experiences of the women, to make space for emotions, show understanding and give tailored information and care. In further research, we would like to explore the views of the partners and couples with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Key words: Intracytoplasmic sperm injection, Puerperium, ART.