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Safe Conception for HIV Discordant Couples through Sperm-Washing: Experience and Perceptions of Patients in Milan, Italy

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Abstract: *Our research explored the reproductive desires of HIV-negative women and their HIV-positive partners who underwent assisted conception based on sperm-washing and intrauterine insemination in Italy. Twenty-two semi-structured interviews were conducted with former patients (6 women, 5 men and 11 couples). Desire for children, perceived risk from treatment and acceptability of the insemination technique were some of the issues explored. Participants had the treatment for a mean duration of 3.5 years, with a mean number of cycles of 5.3. They were highly motivated to conceive a biological child to bring purpose to their lives, and strongly desired options to conceive safely. Most rejected spontaneous conception. Those who successfully conceived reported a positive impact on their quality of life, fulfilling their desire to be parents and restoring their sense of "normalcy". Participants strongly supported extending assisted conception services to all HIV negative women living with HIV positive partners who wished to become pregnant and felt that withholding such treatment was not ethically justified. They perceived assisted conception services to be a safe and effective alternative to spontaneous conception, and felt that society has a moral obligation to provide such services. ©2008 Reproductive Health Matters. All rights reserved.*

Keywords: HIV sexual transmission, HIV serodiscordant couples, sperm-washing, assisted conception, Italy

SEVERAL studies have focused on the reproductive options and desires of HIV positive women who face multiple challenges of disease management and vertical transmission during and after pregnancy.^{1,2} Very little, however, is known about pregnancy decision-making of HIV negative women who are knowingly in

relationships with an HIV positive partner, especially with regard to their perceived risk of seroconversion and their desire to conceive their own biological children. These couples may face difficult choices as they balance the risks of transmission associated with spontaneous conception with their desire to conceive.