Impact of sperm DNA fragmentation on reproductive outcome following IVF and ICSI: a retrospective analysis of 406 cases

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Study question:
Currently, no published data describes the impact of sperm DNA fragmentation on the outcome of IVF and ICSI treatments in a typical population of women seen by fertility centers where no selection with regard to age or body mass index (BMI) is possible.

Keywords:
sperm DNA fragmentation, ART outcome

Summary answer:
A significant negative effect on the reproductive outcome of IVF and ICSI treatments was seen when the sperm DNA fragmentation index (DFI) was above 15% and 25%, respectively.

Study design, size, duration:
This retrospective study reviewed non-donor IVF and ICSI clinical records and corresponding laboratory data. Outcome of the first treatment cycle was included in the data. Thresholds for DFI of 15 and 25 were used for IVF and ICSI, respectively. Effect on outcome below and above the threshold was analyzed.

Materials and methods:
IVF (n=210) and ICSI (n=196) treatments were performed by two fertility centers. Pregnancy was confirmed by ultrasound at 12 week gestation. As a part of the male fertility investigation, DFI was determined using the Sperm DNA Integrity (SDI) test modified from Evenson & Jost (Current Protocols In Flow Cytometry 2000;7,13:1-27).

Main results and the role of chance:
In the IVF group, all DFI values were below 25 (according to the recommendation after the SDI test result). In the ICSI group, DFI values varied up to 61.2.

Clinical pregnancy rate was 37.6% (79/210) for first cycle IVF treatments. The clinical pregnancy rate was 45.1% when DFI was below 15, and diminished to 24.6% when DFI was between 15 and 25. Odds ratio adjusted for female age was 2.63 (95% CI 1.36 to 5.11, P=0.0014).

For first cycle ICSI treatments, the average clinical pregnancy rate was 40.8%. When DFI was below 25, the success rate was 48.7%. Above this threshold, the clinical pregnancy rate was 29.6%. Odds ratio adjusted for female age was 2.15 (95% CI 1.14 to 4.05, P=0.0045).

Limitations, reason for caution:
BMI is a potential confounder but was not recorded routinely at the time of the fertility treatments. A logistic statistical model was applied to account for the potential effect of female age, an additive effect of female age was detected, but no significant interaction was found.

Study funding/competing interest(s):
No external funding. P. Christensen and A. Birck are co-founders of SPZ Lab who performed the SDI test.

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Wider implications of the findings:
These data show that the IVF success rate declines when DFI is above 15. For patients with DFI above 15, ICSI treatment appears to be more likely to succeed. For both treatments, the decrease in success rates with higher DFI values makes it desirable to investigate and treat the cause of sperm DNA fragmentation prior to ART. Reduction of the sperm DNA fragmentation prior to fertility treatments is likely to increase reproductive outcome.