Barriers and facilitators to fertility preservation care: a meta-synthesis

Context
Despite policy recommendations, few cancer patients of reproductive age undergo fertility preservation counselling and treatment.

Objective
To systematically review the literature for qualitative evidence on barriers and facilitators to fertility preservation for cancer patients, their families and healthcare providers.

Methods
A systematic review and meta-synthesis of qualitative and mixed-methods studies with a qualitative component are reported. We searched MEDLINE, EMBASE, PsycINFO, CINAHL as well as grey literature. Two authors independently screened for eligibility, extracted data and assessed the quality of included studies. Risk of bias and applicability concerns were investigated according to the Critical Appraisal Skills Program. Thematic framework and synthesis were used to analyze and synthesize the data.

Population
Cancer patients or cancer survivors of reproductive age, their families and healthcare providers caring for such patients were included.

Intervention(s)
Papers investigating perceptions of barriers or facilitators to fertility preservation for cancer treatment.

Main Outcome Measure(s)
Perceptions related to fertility preservation at the time of cancer diagnosis, barriers and facilitators to fertility preservation.

Result(s)
Thirty-seven studies were eligible revealing seven major themes. Complex convergences of barriers within and beyond the health system were seen to complicate and hinder engagement in fertility preservation care for both patients and healthcare providers. Internally driven barriers included funding and health services limitations, while external barriers included communication gaps that were further complicated by the different perceptions of providers and patients.

Conclusions
Externally and internally driven barriers influence cancer patients' and healthcare providers' engagement in fertility preservation care.