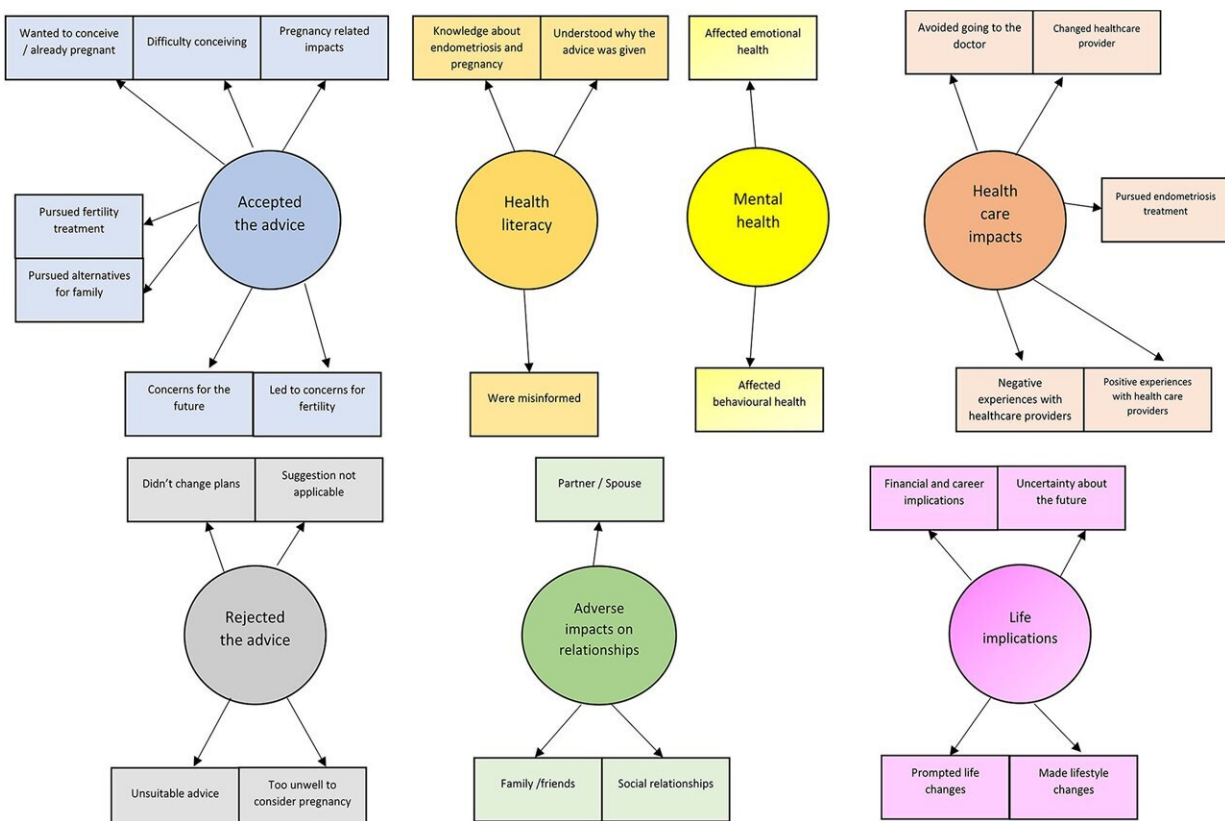


# Patients told to get pregnant to treat endometriosis despite lack of evidence, research shows

December 12 2023, by Jessica Stanley



Credit: *BMC Women's Health* (2023). DOI: 10.1186/s12905-023-02794-2

Research shows patients with endometriosis are being told to plan a pregnancy to help manage or treat the condition, despite a lack of

evidence to show it reduces symptoms. The controversial advice has prompted calls to improve medical education about endometriosis.

More than 3,000 medically diagnosed patients were surveyed across the globe as part of the collaborative study involving researchers from the University of Adelaide, University of Sydney and EndoActive, a not-for-profit charity focusing on awareness, information, and advocacy.

The research, which focused on patient experiences, revealed more than half (1,892 of 3,347 total) were advised to fall pregnant or have a baby to manage or treat [endometriosis](#), which can include severe pelvic pain and infertility. Almost 90% (1,691 of 1,892) of endometriosis patients were given this recommendation by [health care professionals](#), including gynecologists and GPs, with 36% told it would cure their condition.

"Pregnancy or having a baby isn't a treatment for endometriosis and this [advice](#) from [health professionals](#) can have [negative impacts](#) on those who receive it," said co-author Professor Louise Hull, a fertility expert from the University of Adelaide's Robinson Research Institute.

Although this advice is well-meaning, in modern practice, there are better ways of discussing fertility concerns and fertility options with people with endometriosis.

"While a third of the respondents felt the advice was appropriate given their situation at the time, many other women in this survey reported feeling too young to have a baby and felt stressed and pressured after being given this inappropriate albeit well-intentioned advice," said Professor Hull.

Some of the patient responses from the research paper, which has been [published](#) in *BMC Women's Health*, include: "I was 21, single and at uni so it simply wasn't an option" and "I was 13. It wasn't appropriate."

The research also revealed the life-altering impact this advice had on the mental health of patients, their relationships, major life decisions and their trust in the health care system.

"It ended up ruining my relationship as I felt a huge pressure to have kids young and my partner couldn't understand this intense conversation at a young age," said one respondent.

The European Society for Human Reproduction Embryology (ESHRE) Guidelines for Management of Endometriosis state that patients should not be advised to become pregnant with the sole purpose of treating endometriosis, as pregnancy does not always lead to improvement of symptoms or reduction of disease progression.

"EndoActive supports health professionals providing fertility advice in appropriate circumstances particularly as endo may impact fertility. However, pregnancy advice, especially in relation to curing or treating this condition is inappropriate because babies are not treatment options and the advice is not evidence-based," said Sylvia Freedman, the Co-founder of EndoActive who also co-authored this paper.

Researchers are now recommending more education about treating endometriosis for health care professionals.

"Endometriosis affects one in seven women and those assigned female at birth. Asking patients about their fertility preferences, while also providing evidence-based advice on the treatment and management of the condition is crucial to improve patient experiences and outcomes," said Professor Hull.

**More information:** Diksha Sirohi et al, Patient experiences of being advised by a healthcare professional to get pregnant to manage or treat endometriosis: a cross-sectional study, *BMC Women's Health* (2023).

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