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Memory of  
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## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## EVALUATION OF HORMONAL FUNCTION IN WOMEN WITH CERVICAL INSUFFICIENCY AND INFERTILITY IN THE HISTORY

DOI: 10.36740/WLek202110109

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### ABSTRACT

**The aim:** To assess the levels of hormones in women with cervical insufficiency and infertility in the history in the II trimester of gestation.

**Materials and methods:** 120 pregnant women with cervical insufficiency and anovulatory infertility in the history were examined in the II trimester of gestation: in the I group (60 persons) pregnancy occurred after hormonal treatment of infertility, in the II group (60 individuals) – after in vitro fertilization. 30 pregnant women without cervical insufficiency and a history of infertility were controls. The levels of estradiol, progesterone, placental lactogen, prolactin and cortisol were determined in the blood serum.

**Results:** The concentration of maternal progesterone was lower in the persons in the I group on 12.36 %, in the II group – on the 15.37 % ( $p=0.03$ ) compared to the healthy women. Cortisol and prolactin amounts were statistically higher in I and II groups ( $p<0.001$ ) than in controls. While the levels of estradiol and placental lactogen were slightly less in the subjects with cervical insufficiency and a history of anovulatory infertility compared to the healthy women.

**Conclusions:** In pregnant women with cervical insufficiency and a history of anovulatory infertility in the II trimester of gestation there are decrease progesterone level and high prolactin and cortisol concentrations in blood serum. The changes in estradiol and placental lactogen amounts are not significant compared to healthy women.

**KEY WORDS:** cervical insufficiency, anovulatory infertility, hormones

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### INTRODUCTION

Physiological pregnancy and labor are one of the main priority aspects of modern obstetrics. Nowadays the percent of the complications during pregnancy grows up that leads to the negative obstetrical and perinatal outcomes. According to the data of the World Health Organization 15 million newborns are born before 37 completed weeks of gestation, and the frequency of preterm birth varieties from 5 % to 18 % of babies born [1]. There are different risk factors of prematurity – gestational complications such as placental disorders, diabetes, hypertension, cervical insufficiency (CI), treatment of infertility with additional reproductive technology (ART), such as in vitro fertilization (IVF), donor oocytes and/or thawed embryos [2]. Thus, especially difficulties with the gestational period have the women with a history of infertility. In Ukraine, more than 15 % of married couples are infertile [3]. Such women usually need specific and complex medical treatment for pregnancy occurs. So, the correction of these hormonal problems can lead to pregnancy, but such gestation is usually complicated. Pregnancy loss, missed abortion, miscarriage, premature labor, CI, negative perinatal outcomes are closely related to pregnancies after ART [4, 5].

Cervical insufficiency is one of the reasons for preterm labor and its rate is approximately 1 % [6] but its frequency is much higher in the patients after IVF – up to 9.7-14.4 % [7]. Generally, most of the cases of CI development are connected with organic pathology – cervical trauma during previous labor, gynecological manipulations on the cervix. But also hormonal dysbalance, which is present in the women with anovulatory infertility, can play an important role in the genesis of functional CI.

### THE AIM

The aim of the study was to assess the levels of hormones in women with cervical insufficiency and infertility in the history in the II trimester of gestation.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

We examined 120 pregnant women with cervical insufficiency in the term of 19-22 weeks of gestation. The diagnosis of CI was based according to the transvaginal ultrasound criteria: the length of the cervix is 25 mm and less, V-shaped transformation of the cervical canal

**Table I.** Reproductive characteristics of observed groups (abs., (%))

| Parameter          | I group (n=60) | II group (n=60) | Control group (n=30) |
|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Age:               |                |                 |                      |
| till 19 years      | -              | -               | 1 (3.33)             |
| 19-34 years        | 55 (91.67)     | 50 (83.33)      | 26 (86.67)           |
| 35 and more years  | 5 (8.33)       | 10 (16.67)      | 3 (10.00)            |
| Pregnancy:         |                |                 |                      |
| the first          | 29 (48.33)     | 39 (65.00)      | 17 (56.67)           |
| the second         | 26 (43.34)     | 10 (16.67)      | 8 (26.67)            |
| the third and more | 5 (8.33)       | 11 (18.33)      | 5 (16.66)            |
| Labor:             |                |                 |                      |
| null               | 41 (68.33)     | 55 (91.67)      | 19 (63.33)           |
| one                | 17 (28.34)     | 5 (8.33)        | 8 (26.67)            |
| two and more       | 2 (3.33)       | -               | 3 (10.00)            |
| Miscarriage        | 7 (11.67)      | 9 (15.00) •     | 2 (6.67)             |
| Missed abortion    | 3 (5.00)       | 3 (5.00)        | -                    |
| Molar pregnancy    | 1 (1.67)       | 1 (1.67)        | -                    |
| Induced abortion   | 3 (5.00)       | 5 (8.33) °      | 2 (6.67)             |
| Ectopic pregnancy  | 1 (1.67)       | 5 (8.33)        | -                    |

Notes: • - three of nine persons had two miscarriages; ° - one from five women had two induced abortions.

**Table II.** The levels of hormones in the blood serum in examined patients

| Hormone                  | I group (n=60) | II group (n=60) | Control group (n=30) |
|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Estradiol, pg/ml         | 9414.18±182.39 | 9243.12±199.64  | 9826.43±286.38       |
| Progesterone, ng/ml      | 46.29±1.38     | 44.70±1.93*     | 52.82±3.18           |
| Placental lactogen, mg/l | 2.64±0.09      | 2.53±0.11       | 2.86±0.19            |
| Prolactin, ng/ml         | 231.02±7.91*   | 269.07±10.39*   | 162.33±10.76         |
| Cortisol, nmol/L         | 534.57±18.22*  | 583.56±17.59*   | 409.04±25.09         |

Note: \* – the statistical significance of differences of indicator relative to the control group ( $p < 0.05$ ).

on 40 % and more [8]. All these persons in anamnesis had infertility associated with anovulation. According to the type of the treatment of infertility the women with CI were divided into two groups. Thus, the I group consisted of 60 patients with CI and infertility in whom the pregnancy occurred after hormonal treatment (ovarian stimulation with clomiphene citrate, gonadotropin-releasing hormone agonists). 60 women with CI and infertility who became pregnant after the use of ART – in vitro fertilization – formed the II group. In the I trimester of pregnancy persons in the I group received vaginal micronized progesterone 200 mg ones a day, in the II group – 400 mg. Infertility was diagnosed according to the recommendations of the World Health Organization [9]. The control group involved 30 women with physiological pregnancy and without a history of infertility. Inclusion criteria: singleton pregnancy, CI, infertility associated with anovulation, written consent of the patient. Exclusion criteria: multiple pregnancy, antiphospholipid syndrome, thrombophilia, pregnancy complicated with ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome, cytogenetic causes of pregnancy loss induced by IVF, male infertility, connective tissue dysplasia, increased risk of chromosomal fetal abnormalities according to first or

second genetic screening. The study was carried in City Clinical Perinatal Centre (Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine) and approved by the Ethics Commission at Ivano-Frankivsk National Medical University (protocol 97/17, 19.10.2017).

ELISA method was used to determine hormones in the serum blood in pregnant women. The levels of hormones were studied in the term of the 19-22 weeks of pregnancy after a confirmed diagnosis of CI. The concentrations of estradiol, progesterone, placental lactogen, prolactin, and cortisol were determined with reagents “IMMULITE 2000 Estradiol”, “IMMULITE 2000 Progesterone”, “IMMULITE 2000 Placental lactogen”, “IMMULITE 2000 Prolactin” and “IMMULITE 2000 Cortisol” respectively.

Statistical data were analyzed by the program Statistica 6.0. We calculated arithmetic mean value, average standard error, criterion  $\chi^2$  (Yates corrected Chi-square), the nonparametric Mann-Whitney test was used to compare two independent groups by a single feature. The difference between the values was considered significant by  $p \leq 0.05$ .

## RESULTS

Our data demonstrated that the average age of women with the history of infertility after IVF (31.42±0.56 years,

$p < 0.001$ ) was significantly higher compared to control persons ( $27.30 \pm 0.92$  years). While in the II group there was no considerable difference in average age of examined patients ( $29.07 \pm 0.59$  years) compared to controls. Also, there was no distinction in the age structure between individuals of all groups (table I). Persons of active reproductive age (20-34 years old) predominated in all groups. The number of primigravida subjects over multigravida ones was more in the II and control groups, multigravida women were in majority in the I group, but the difference between individuals with the first pregnancy and the second or more pregnancies was not significant. At the same time, 55 (91.67 %) pregnant women with CI after IVF were going to deliver at the first time, that was in 1.45 and 1.34 times more than in control group (63.33 %;  $\chi^2 = 9.13$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ) and in the I group (68.33 %;  $\chi^2 = 8.80$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ) respectively. In the I group primary infertility was diagnosed in 29 (48.33 %) individuals, secondary one – in 31 (51.67 %), in the II group – 39 (65.00 %) and 21 (35.00 %) women respectively.

Endometriosis was the most spread gynecological pathology among the patients with the history of infertility – 22 (36.67 %) women in the I group and 29 (48.33 %) subjects in the II. In the I group hyperprolactinemia was in the second place among gynecological diseases – 19 (31.67 %) individuals, 10 (16.67 %) women had diminished ovarian reserve, 9 (15.00 %) – thyroid diseases, 3 (5.00 %) – uterine myoma. In the II group besides endometriosis, 23 (38.33 %) patients were diagnosed polycystic ovary syndrome, 16 (26.67 %) – diminished ovarian reserve, 7 (11.67 %) – hyperprolactinemia, 5 (8.33 %) – uterine myoma and 2 (3.33 %) – pathology of the thyroid gland. Only 2 (6.67 %) controls persons had endometriosis.

It was found some variations in the concentrations of hormones between control persons and women in the I and II groups (table II). The level of estrogen and placental lactogen in the blood serum in the patients with CI and infertility in both groups was slightly less than in healthy subjects. The amount of progesterone was lower in individuals in the I group on 12.36 %, in the II – on the 15.37 % ( $p = 0.03$ ) compared to the healthy persons. The most significant changes related to the levels of cortisol and prolactin. So, the concentration of prolactin was higher in the women in the I group on 42.32 % ( $p < 0.001$ ), in the II group – on the 65.75 % ( $p < 0.001$ ) compared to the control persons. A similar trend observed regarding the amount of cortisol. Its level was on the 30.69 % ( $p < 0.001$ ) and 42.67 % ( $p < 0.001$ ) more in the I and II group respectively compared to the control individuals.

## DISCUSSION

Numerous researches indicate the hormonal changes in the women after ART in the I trimester of pregnancy compared to spontaneous pregnancy. Thus, Vygivska LM and Nykoniuk TR found that the rate of pregnancy loss in the patients with endocrine infertility was determined in

4.5 and 5.8 times more often compared with the subjects with tubal infertility and male infertility respectively [10]. They estimated that in the women with endocrine infertility and ART the concentration of estradiol in blood serum in the I trimester of gestation was in 2 times higher compared to the women without infertility and use of ART, in individuals with tubal infertility – in 1.6, male infertility – 1.3 times more than in controls. The authors associated such hyperestrogenism with the use of gonadotropin-releasing hormone agonists and human menopause gonadotropins for ovarian stimulation. At the same time, the level of progesterone was slightly less in subjects with infertility that can be explained that the pregnant women with ART take progesterone drugs in the I trimester of gestation [10]. However, individuals after ART have higher cortisol level at the beginning of gestation compared with healthy women with spontaneous conceived [11]. Furthermore, according to the data of Vygivska LM et al. the amount of cortisol was significantly greater in the I, II, III trimester of gestation in the pregnant persons after ART compared to control individuals ( $p < 0.05$ ), as well as prolactin concentration, which was higher in such patients during the whole gestational period ( $p < 0.05$ ). The scientists believe that such changes in the amount of these hormones are connected with increased level of state and trait anxiety. Grossi E. et al. studied the concentrations of  $17\beta$ -estradiol and progesterone in venous blood of women with spontaneous singleton pregnancy between  $5^{+0}$  and  $13^{+6}$  weeks of gestation. Their results indicate the presence of specific week variations of  $17\beta$ -estradiol in the I trimester that can be helpful for assessment of the course of twin gestation and pregnancy after ART [12]. It is known that there is a higher concentrations of  $\beta$ -chorionic gonadotropin and estradiol in maternal blood samples by twin pregnancy compared to singleton pregnancy after the use of ART in the first trimester of gestation [13].

Cervical insufficiency is mostly diagnosed in the II trimester of gestation, so, the results of hormonal variations in patients with CI commonly regard the second part of pregnancy (II or the III trimester). Impairment of the cervix obstructive function is also relative to the variations of estradiol and progesterone in the blood serum in pregnant women [14]. Estradiol level in the persons with CI in the II and III trimesters was correlated to the control indices of the physiological pregnancy. However, the progesterone concentration was almost in 2 times less compared to the individuals with normal cervical obstructive function. Such differences in the concentrations of the hormones lead to relative hypoprogesteronemia [14, 15].

According to the research of Patil AS et al. the maternal amount of progesterone and its metabolites, especially 11-deoxycorticosterone, may have meaning in the development of spontaneous preterm delivery and increases its risk. It was found that the concentration of deoxycorticosterone at the end of the I trimester and the beginning of the II trimester was associated with spontaneous delivery until 32 weeks



of gestation. The ratio of 11-deoxycorticosterone / 16-alpha-hydroxyprogesterone was higher in women with preterm labor until 32 weeks [16].

We did not find scientific publications about estradiol, progesterone, placental lactogen, prolactin and cortisol concentrations in blood serum in pregnant women in the II trimester of gestation, who conceived after anovulatory infertility and were diagnosed cervical insufficiency. So, the results of our research demonstrated that in the II trimester of gestation there is a lower concentration of progesterone in the pregnant women with CI and infertility in the history, especially in patients conceived after IVF ( $p < 0.05$ ), compared to controls, that corresponds to the data of other scientists. But it's worth mentioning that such results of progesterone concentration were obtained despite the fact that patients in the II group received progesterone drugs. Also, we found the tendency to decrease of placental lactogen amount in women with CI and infertility in the history. The higher levels of cortisol and prolactin in blood serum in women with CI and infertility are consistent with other studies that demonstrate the similar increased parameters in patients who have CI, as well in pregnant persons after the use of ART. According to the results of this research it is worth to discuss the possibility to prolong to use vaginal progesterone in the II trimester of gestation in women, who conceived after anovulatory infertility, as well as about additional psychological support for decrease of stress-related hormones such as prolactin and cortisol.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the II trimester of gestation the concentration of progesterone in blood serum of pregnant women with cervical insufficiency and anovulatory infertility in the history, expressly in persons after IVF, is significantly lower compared to persons without cervical incompetence and infertility and amounts of prolactin and cortisol are significantly higher. At the same time, there was no pronounced difference between levels of estradiol and placental lactogen in women with cervical insufficiency and anovulatory infertility and controls, but there is a trend to decrease of these hormones in the II trimester.

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**Conflict of interest:**

*The Authors declare no conflict of interest*

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