

Cycle Apps – help or confusion?

Understanding women’s perception towards cycle tracking apps.

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Background

- Women seeking to conceive, wish to do so quickly, so often choose tools to help them to get pregnant faster.
- The day of ovulation can vary considerably between women and even between cycles¹, so accurate methods to time intercourse appropriately are of value.
- Calendar-based apps which predict women’s fertile phase are based on cycle length alone have been shown to be inaccurate²⁻⁵.
- Cycle apps are commonly used by women seeking to conceive; 67.4% of women who participated in the wider study reported to have previously used them.
- However, most fertility apps have been shown to be inaccurate (2-5) and do not provide women seeking to conceive information regarding accuracy.
- This leads to the potential for women using predictions from calendar-based apps to mistime intercourse, reducing their likelihood of conceiving and delaying increasing time to pregnancy.

Study question

How do women perceive the fertility predictions that are provided through calendar-based cycle tracking apps?

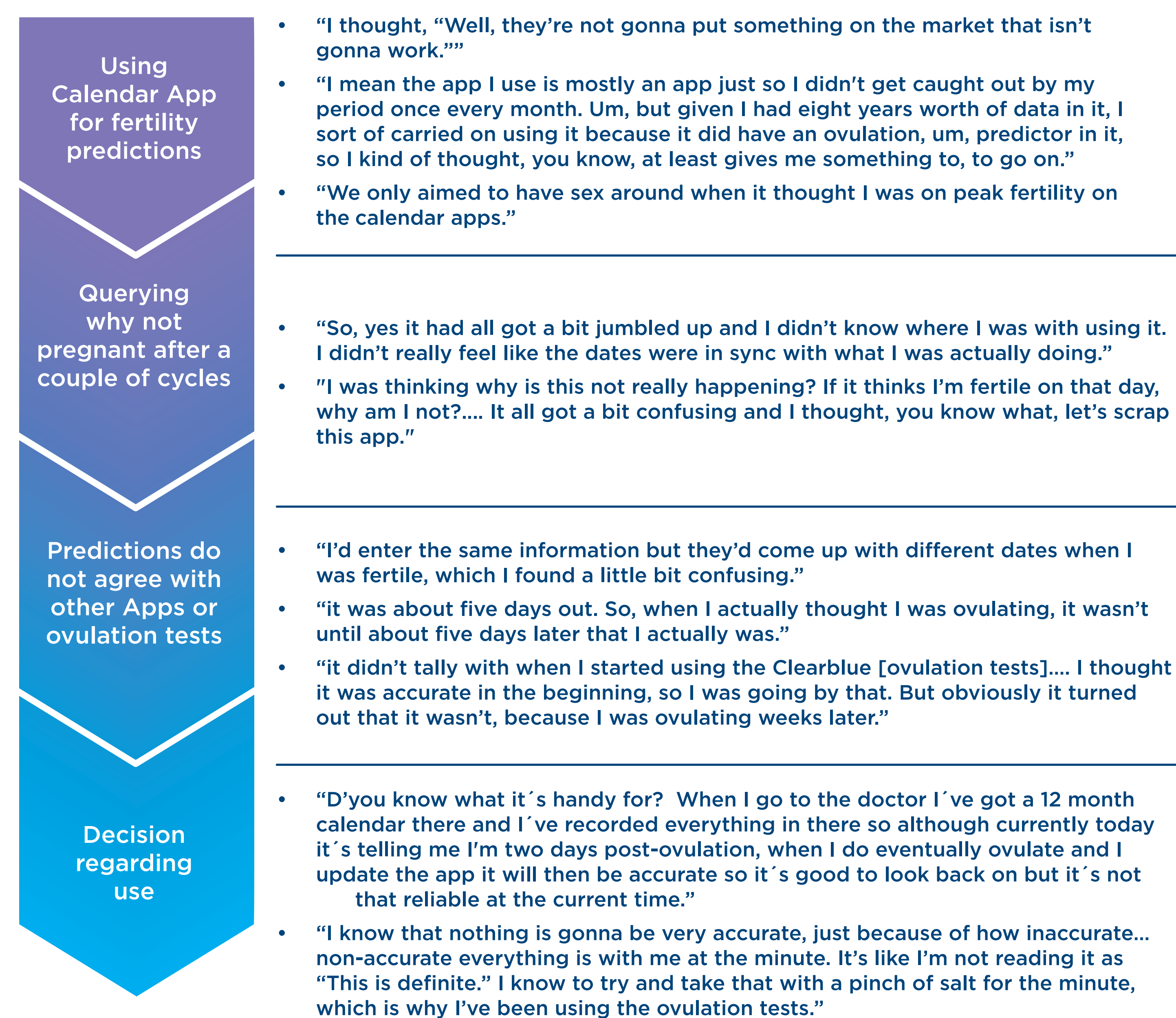
Methods

- This study was a qualitative component of a larger mixed methods study examining the efficacy of the Clearblue® Connected Ovulation Test System.
- Women of reproductive age (18-40), who had a smartphone and were actively trying to conceive were recruited from across the UK.
- Telephone interviews were conducted to discuss views on fertility, family planning and experience of trying to conceive.
- We performed 38 qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews on women randomly sampled from both study arms and all study outcomes (conceived after 1 or 2 cycles, or did not conceive during the study).
- All women were provided ovulation tests before the interviews were conducted, either as part of the test arm or after completing the study for those on the control arm.
- Interviews were recorded and the verbatim transcripts were coded line by line, then similar codes grouped into categories (themes) using NVivo. The interviews were conducted throughout May – September 2018.
- Ethical approval was given from an internal review board and all volunteers gave written, informed consent. Trial registration number: NCT03424590.

“...I don't know if I'd have questioned the app. I might have just questioned my body more than the app, because, like I say, you don't know what's going on inside your body, I could have not been ovulating or releasing an egg, or whatever.it's hard to question technology really, isn't it?Because you think it's got the answers to everything”

Results

Key themes that arose from the analysis of the interviews regarding apps are shown as stages in the users journey when using cycle apps for conception purposes (figure below).



Discussion

- Busy lifestyles and the tendency for sexual frequency to decline over the course of the relationship⁵, means that timed intercourse is often used when a couple decide to start trying for a family.
- Fertility tracking apps are very popular but have been shown to be inaccurate²⁻⁴. Most do not provide any evidence to support their claims or give an explanation on how the predictions are calculated.
- Some women trust these calendar-based apps implicitly targeting intercourse on the days predicted and would question their bodies before the fertility apps that they use.
- During study participation, many women found that predictions from their previously trusted calendar-based apps did not agree with results from ovulation tests which they found confusing.

Conclusion

- Using calendar-based apps without understanding their limitations and following incorrect advice could prolong a woman’s time to pregnancy and cause unnecessary stress.
- We would recommend that fertility apps provide more information on their accuracy and limitations in order to be of greater help to women who are trying to conceive.

Declaration of interest

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