

# **“PART OF A SUITE OF SOLUTIONS”: A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING THE USE OF *NATURAL CYCLES* FERTILITY TRACKING APP IN THE ‘PREVENT A PREGNANCY’ MODE.**

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## **Background:**

The past decade has seen a considerable rise in mHealth apps, providing an opportunity to improve health agency, accessibility and autonomy. Fertility tracking apps (FTAs) in particular are widely popular, with over 68 million downloads. Natural Cycles is the first and only FTA to be certified as a contraceptive method by both the US FDA and the European Union. In the context of its recent rise, this qualitative study aims to explore the role of its use as an emerging contraceptive method.

## **Methods:**

Recruitment was through the Natural Cycles app and social media, with snowball sampling for male partners. Purposive sampling was undertaken to recruit participants who had used Natural Cycles in both the ‘plan’ and ‘prevent’ pregnancy modes. Thirty in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted (24 women; 6 male partners). Emerging themes were guided and refined by a hybrid of an inductive and deductive approach.

## **Results:**

Participants deemed the app suitable for individuals with routine, stability, or ambivalence towards pregnancy. Starting Natural Cycles was often due to a push away from hormones, and a pull towards natural. Through using the app, participants expressed a sense of empowerment and control over their fertility. Yet there appeared to be a fine line between the app either validating, or dictating subjective experiences of mood and libido. Through this, the use of Natural Cycles appeared to reinforce gender norms and expectations. Further, feelings of guilt, shame and blame emerged among those experiencing failure of the app to prevent pregnancy.

## **Conclusion:**

Fertility tracking apps, such as Natural Cycles, are an emerging field that is reframing contraception and menstrual tracking. FTAs may offer greater understanding of one’s body and cycles. Despite an acknowledgement of its limitations, Natural Cycles provided another option of contraceptive choice, which may be suitable and acceptable for particular circumstances and preferences.

## **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

This project is part of a larger qualitative study, The Freyja Study, which explores use and experience of NC for (pre-) conception. The Freyja Study was funded by Natural Cycles, however Natural cycles has had no involvement in the study design, data collection, analysis or interpretation.