A preliminary evaluation of influence of body mass index on in vitro fertilization outcome in non-obese endometriosis patients

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Abstract

Background/aims: Obese and overweight women experience a lower probability for pregnancy after IVF. However, despite the increasing prevalence of obesity, the large majority of infertile women are non-obese. One of the most common indications for IVF is endometriosis. Thought-provoking inverse correlation has been established between BMI and endometriosis. Lower BMI is a risk factor for development of endometriosis and a predictive factor for severe endometriosis. Since severe endometriosis carries lower reproductive chances, even after IVF, we preliminary tested a hypothesis that higher BMI among non-obese endometriosis patients improves IVF outcomes.

Methods: Preliminary retrospective observational cross-sectional study was performed in women with endometriosis as a sole infertility cause who underwent IVF. During analyzed period we performed 2782 IVF procedures. In order to achieve highly homogenous study sample and to eliminate almost all confound factors that could lead to bias, we implemented strict study criteria. The number of eligible subjects was 156 and they were divided into underweight, normal weight and overweight groups. Primary outcomes were number of retrieved oocytes, good quality oocytes, embryos, and the rates of biochemical, clinical and ongoing pregnancies. For group comparisons, we used parametric test, analysis of variance, and non-parametric tests (Kruskal-Wallis test, Chi-square test). Logistic regression and General linear model was used to assess correlation between BMI and dependent variables (outcome and stimulation duration) when adjusted for age.

Results: Endometriosis as a single infertility factor among IVF couples had prevalence of 5.61%. Underweight women accounted for 10.26%, normal weight 71.15% and overweight 18.59% of study population. Significant differences were not found in number of retrieved oocytes ($p = 0.880$), good quality oocytes ($p = 0.476$), obtained embryos ($p = 0.706$), and biochemical ($p = 0.298$), clinical ($p = 0.770$) and ongoing ($p = 0.822$) pregnancy rates between study groups.

Conclusion: Although preliminary results do not support our hypothesis, increase in BMI did not adversely affect the outcome of IVF in non-obese endometriosis patients, which is in contrast to literature data as regards general population of infertile women undergoing IVF. Prospective studies with large number of patients with endometriosis or prospective case-control studies should address these issues and provide more comprehensive counselling of infertile endometriosis patients regarding achievement of optimal BMI prior to IVF with the intention of achievement higher pregnancy rates.

Keywords: Endometriosis, Body mass index, In vitro fertilization, Pregnancy rate
Background
Following the publication of numerous studies which demonstrated sub-optimal reproductive ability of obese women, the consequences of the obesity on in vitro fertilization (IVF) have been in the focus of the contemporary infertility research. Overweight and obese women experience a lower probability for pregnancy after IVF [1]. Body mass index (BMI) is inversely related to intrafollicular human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG) concentrations, embryo quality and IVF outcome [2]. Despite the increasing prevalence of obesity, obese women make up a lesser proportion of women who obtain fertility-related services and the large majority of infertile women are still in the non-obese BMI range [3]. Against this background, it would be important to evaluate the influence of BMI on IVF outcome among the non-obese women.

Therewithal, thought-provoking relationship has been established between BMI and the endometriosis, the latter being one of the most common causes of infertility. Endometriosis demonstrated an inverse correlation with BMI as infertile obese women were at lower risk for development of endometriosis [4]. Furthermore, it has been shown that lower BMI could be considered as a predictive factor not only for any type of endometriosis but also for severe ones [5]. The fact that moderate and severe forms of the disease carry lower reproductive chances lead us to a hypothesis that higher BMI among endometriosis patients increases the probability of conception during IVF treatment.

Taking into account that, to the best of our knowledge, the impact of BMI on the outcome of IVF in non-obese women with endometriosis has not yet been evaluated, the aim of our study was to perform preliminary assessment of the influence of BMI on IVF outcome in these patients and to provide up-to date data for future trials in this field. Considering that vast majority of endometriosis patients are not obese, characterizing association of a range of BMIs with IVF outcome could enlighten the management of endometriosis patients.

Methods
We investigated the influence of BMI on outcome of first, fresh, autologous IVF cycles in non-obese patients (BMI < 30) with previously diagnosed endometriosis in an observational cross-sectional study within IVF Department of The University Clinic for Gynecology and Obstetrics “Narodni front”, Belgrade, from 1st January 2007 to 31st May 2016. This study was approved by the Institutional review board (decision No.24/10–3).

Medical records in our department before 2011 were kept in paper format. After 2011, the records were kept both in paper and electronic medical records (Meditex software, Fertility database system for therapy documentation and quality assurance for reproductive medicine, CRITEX GmbH, Regensburg, Germany). All data have been entered in electronic records exclusively by gynecologists and embryologists of our IVF department, who are also the members of the study team (BA, DL, DBJ, BM, MP) and the data before 2011 have been entered retrospectively. The study data came from electronic medical records and lifestyle and exposure factor questionnaires completed during the admission to our department. The study data were extracted by MP, BA, DBJ, DL, BM and JR and validated by the Head of IVF Department (EG).

We analyzed the data of laparoscopically diagnosed patients with any of all four grades of the endometriosis according to the Revised Classification of the American Society of Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) [6]. The endometriosis staging at our clinic is performed at the time of laparoscopy and reassessed immediately after operation by senior doctors who are calculating a score from reading the operative notes. We investigated only infertile women who underwent laparoscopy. Therefore the basic criteria for performing laparoscopy in our study participants were infertility or infertility with the assumption of the existence of endometriosis on the basis of previous clinical and ultrasound findings.

A standardized infertility evaluation was performed on all study participants. In order to disable the effects of male infertility on IVF outcome, we investigated only women whose partners had normal semen analysis [7]. With the aim of avoidance of influences of other female infertility factors on the outcome of IVF, we analyzed the data of women with endometriosis as the only cause of infertility. Furthermore, having in mind that the surgical procedures performed on the ovaries and fallopian tubes compromise the vascularity of the ovary and thereby may affect ovarian reserve and reproductive chances, women with this kind of operations unrelated to the treatment of endometriosis, were also excluded. Additionally, women with diseases which could influence the IVF outcome (i.e. autoimmune disorders, diabetes mellitus, trombophilies, thyroid gland diseases), were excluded too.

Study participants were divided into underweight (BMI < 18.5), normal weight (BMI 18.5–24.9), and overweight (BMI 25–29.9) groups. Calculation of BMI was performed from anthropometric measurements of patients obtained in our department. Patients were measured on a digital scale that shows body weight in kilograms by the reliability of ±100 g. Measurement of body height was done in a standing position, without shoes, with shoulders in a relaxed position and was measured in cm and measured to the nearest 0.5 cm tick marks.

Several characteristics of study participants were analyzed to eliminate possible confounding factors influencing the outcome of IVF. Evaluated demographic characteristics were age, race, marital status and educational level. Analyzed clinical features of study patients
The serum β-hCG level >50 mIU/ml measured on the 16th day after oocyte retrieval were considered as biochemical pregnancy. Clinical pregnancy was defined as pregnancy with gestational sac or fetal pole visualized on an early ultrasound examination at the 7th week of gestation. The ongoing pregnancy was defined as vital pregnancy with normal ultrasound findings in the 12th week of gestation. All pregnancy rates were calculated per ET.

Data are presented as counts (percents) or mean ±/− standard deviations, depending on data type. For group comparisons, we used parametric test, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and non-parametric tests (Kruskal-Wallis test, Chi-square test). Logistic regression and General linear model was used to assess correlation between BMI and dependent variables (outcome and stimulation duration) when adjusted for age. All data analysis was performed using the statistical software SPSS (IBM corp.). All p values less than 0.05 were considered significant.

Results
During the study period, we performed IVF procedure in 2782 women. After implementation of study criteria, the total number of eligible subjects was 156. Among them 16 were underweight (10.26%), 111 had normal weight (71.15%) and 29 were overweight (18.59%). Characteristics of study patients are presented in Table 1. Highly significant differences were found in age, exercise, educational level and place of residence. None of the study subjects reported alcohol and marijuana consumption.

Analyzed clinical characteristics of participants which may influence the IVF outcome are presented in Table 2. Regarding AMH and AFC, data were known for 109 patients, since the assessment of ovarian reserve with AMH and AFC was not obligatory practice at our clinic until year 2010. Significant differences among study groups were found in previous surgical treatment of endometriosis, as expected. As BMI increased, the percentage of previously surgically treated patients decreased.

The revealed differences among study groups in frequencies of different grades of endometriosis were significant (p < 0.001), as shown in Table 1. Highly significant negative correlation (p < 0.001) was found between BMI and the grade of the endometriosis, with mean BMI being the highest in the minimal form of the disease (ASRM grade I) and the lowest in the severe form (ASRM grade IV), which is shown in Fig. 1.

We used GnRH-a protocol in 68 patients, while GnRH-an protocol was applied in 88 patients. Cycle cancellation due to insufficient follicular development was present in four patients (2.56%), which included three participants in normal weight group and one in overweight group. Although they reached the ovum pick-up stage, two patients (1.28%) were without retrieved oocytes after the procedure. Consequently, primary study outcomes were analyzed in 150 women. The other characteristics of IVF treatment and outcome according to BMI are presented in Table 3.

We used Gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH) agonist (GnRH-a) and GnRH antagonist (GnRH-an) protocols for controlled ovarian stimulation (COS) during the study period. Protocol type was chosen for each patient individually, based on the benefits and shortcomings of each treatment option, and more significantly on the patients’ response and characteristics. Usually, GnRH-an protocol was used for patients with high risk for developing ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome, patients with a higher number of previously unfavorable cycles and patients with advanced age. The presence of at least three follicles with diameter > 17 mm measured during transvaginal ultrasound scan was the criterion for triggering. In case of poor ovarian response, final oocyte maturation was induced if there had been only one follicle with diameter > 17 mm. Ultrasound guided aspirations were performed 35 h after triggering. Two, three or 5 days after oocyte retrieval, embryo transfers (ET) of only top and good quality (GQ) embryos were performed. Micronized Progesterone at daily dose of 600 mg and 250 mg of Hydroxyprogesterone caproate every fifth day, were used for the luteal support.

The analyzed parameters were: duration of COS; the dose of applied gonadotropins; total number of oocytes and number of GQ oocytes obtained by aspiration of follicles; total number of embryos, number of GQ embryos and number of transferred embryos; the rates of biochemical, clinical and ongoing pregnancies. Under the oocytes of good quality we have assumed metaphasis II oocytes and fertilized oocytes after IVF. Embryos were stratified to top, good, poor and bad according to the Instanbul consensus workshop on embryo assessment [8]. Serum β-hCG >50 mIU/ml measured on the 16th day after oocyte retrieval were considered as biochemical pregnancy. Clinical pregnancy was defined as pregnancy with gestational sac or fetal pole visualized on an early
Despite significant rise in the average age of patients between study groups, being the lowest in underweight and the highest in overweight group (Tables 1 and 3), the rates of biochemical, clinical, and ongoing pregnancy increase in the same manner, although not significantly. Since the study groups significantly differed according to age, logistic regression analysis with primary study outcomes (biochemical, clinical, and ongoing pregnancy rates) as the dependent outcomes, and BMI and age as the independent variables, was performed. The analysis revealed that BMI does not significantly affect primary outcomes when adjusted for age. Since stimulation duration was the only secondary study outcome with significant difference between study groups, the same analysis was performed for stimulation duration and it was shown that BMI is still a statistically significant predictor when adjusted for age ($p = 0.021$).

### Discussion

Endometriosis is disease with enigmatic etiology and an anticipated prevalence of 10%, and it can result considerable morbidity, and it is associated with risks for several major chronic diseases, psychological disorders and infertility [9, 10]. Our preliminary study evaluated the effects of BMI on IVF outcomes in non-obese endometriosis patients. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to address this issue in a very homogenous group of patients where the all other infertility causes were excluded, and where the diagnosis of endometriosis had been previously established solely during laparoscopy. Preliminary evaluation suggests that infertile women with endometriosis regarding BMI do not differ significantly in IVF outcomes. Nevertheless, a certain differences exist and although some did not reach statistical significance, ones deserve to be thoroughly annotated.

The prevalence of endometriosis as a single infertility factor among IVF couples was 5.61%. Apparently, the stringent selection study criteria led to the decrease of the number of evaluated endometriosis patients, thus explaining why this prevalence is lower than 9%, as described by other authors [11]. The only study that provided data on the prevalence of under, normal and overweight endometriosis patients who underwent IVF procedure [12], together with studies which revealed the prevalence of those BMI groups in general population of infertile women [13] or population undergoing IVF [11, 14] were published over 15 years ago. The prevalence of underweight infertile women irrespective to infertility causes was 3%, normal weight 17% and overweight 42% [13]. However, the same prevalence among infertile patients who underwent IVF in France were 21.8, 55.8, and 10.3% respectively [14], while in Australia were 12.3, 53.26, and 22.69% respectively [11]. Among non-obese endometriosis patients who underwent IVF in Portugal 21.22% were underweight, 59.4% normal weight and 19.54% were overweight women [12]. However, today’s lifestyle and behavior choices are often sedentary and unhealthy and consequently could lead to regrouping of women between populations of underweight, normal weight, overweight and obese women. We delivered up-to-date information on the specific prevalence of those groups among non-obese infertile women with endometriosis undergoing IVF: underweight, normal weight and overweight participants accounted for 10.26, 71.5 and 18.58% of study population, respectively. One of the aims of preliminary evaluation studies is to provide up-to-date data required for the future prospective trials [15]. The importance of such data lies in fact that an estimate of prevalence is needed for sample size calculation, especially under such circumstances where prevalences differ considerably [16]. Since the literature often delivers several different prevalences, up-to-date facts from the most recent preliminary studies with similar study design and population are most preferable [16]. Therefore, future investigators could calculate sample size accordingly planed primary study endpoint, estimation of pregnancy rates and on those grounds to appraise

### Table 1 Characteristics of the study population

| Body mass index groups | Underweight | Normal weight | Overweight | p value |
|------------------------|-------------|---------------|------------|---------|
| BMI (kg/m²)            | 17.86 ± 0.51| 22.08 ± 1.61  | 26.77 ± 1.49 | NA      |
| Age (years)            | 31.25 ± 2.59| 34.25 ± 3.42  | 35.17 ± 3.31 | 0.001†  |
| Marital status         | 12 (75%)    | 90 (81.1%)    | 21 (72.4%)  | 0.551†  |
| Educational level      |             |               |            |         |
| Primary school         | 1 (6.25%)   | 7 (6.3%)      | 6 (20.68%)  | 0.001†  |
| Secondary school       | 8 (50%)     | 55 (49.54%)   | 21 (72.41%) |         |
| University level       | 7 (43.75%)  | 48 (43.24%)   | 2 (6.89%)   |         |
| Place of residence     | 1 (6.2%)    | 14 (12.6%)    | 10 (34.5%)  | <0.010‡ |
| Rural population       | 15 (93.8%)  | 97 (87.4%)    | 19 (65.5%)  |         |
| Urban population       |             |               |            |         |
| Cigarette smoking      | 8 (50%)     | 26 (23.42%)   | 9 (31.03%)  | 0.076‡  |
| Caffeine intake        | 10 (62.5%)  | 70 (63.06%)   | 15 (51.72%) | 0.532†  |
| Exercise               | 2 (12.5%)   | 23 (20.72%)   | 0 (0%)      | 0.019‡  |
| Occupational exposure  | 1 (6.25%)   | 5 (4.5%)      | 0 (0%)      | 0.434†  |
| Environmental exposure | 1 (6.25%)   | 3 (2.7%)      | 0 (0%)      | 0.613‡  |

*Data are presented as mean ± SD or counts (%).†ANOVA.‡Chi-square test. NA non applicable*
the time needed to enroll the target number of participants and the overall duration of the trial [15].

Analysis of characteristics of study participants demonstrated several significant dissimilarities between study groups. Underweight and normal weight patients more frequently reside in urban settlements, while overweight patients more often inhabit rural areas. This is in accordance with the study performed in the general population of women, which additionally noted that the rate of overweight increase is greater in rural areas than in urban areas [17]. Moreover, the mean age according to the study groups tends to increase as BMI increases ($p < 0.001$). Missmer et al. observed that the incidence rates of laparoscopically confirmed endometriosis are inversely associated with age [18]. This finding, together with our results which showed that the higher grades of endometriosis are more often present in patients with lower BMI, explains the highly significant differences in age among the study groups, with higher prevalence of moderate and severe forms of the disease among women with lower BMI and vice versa. Furthermore, BMI

Table 2 Clinical characteristics of study population

| Body mass index groups | Basal E₂ (pmol/ml) | Basal FSH (mIU/ml) | AMH (ng/ml) | AFC | Infertility duration | Endometriosis | Infertility type | Surgical treatment for endometriosis | Endometrioma |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------|-----|---------------------|---------------|----------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|
|                       | Underweight        | Normal weight      | Overweight  |     |                     | Grade I       | Primary        | None                                | None        |
|                       | 191.58 ± 104.97    | 194.79 ± 180.48    | 220.56 ± 177.41 |     |                     | 2 (12.5%)     | 14 (87.5%)    | 1 (6.25%)                           | 9 (56.25%)  |
|                       | 7.22 ± 2.95        | 7.65 ± 2.86        | 7.22 ± 3.84 |     |                     | 2 (12.5%)     | 2 (12.5%)     | 4 (25%)                             | 4 (25%)     |
|                       | 1.46 ± 1.21        | 1.84 ± 1.61        | 2.21 ± 1.76 |     |                     | 7 (43.75%)    | 7 (43.75%)    | 4 (25%)                             | 3 (18.75%)  |
|                       | 9.8 ± 3.51         | 11.6 ± 6.03        | 10.76 ± 5.32 |     |                     | 5 (31.25%)    | 5 (31.25%)    | 3 (18.75%)                           | 6 (5.40%)   |
|                       | 6.5 ± 3.35         | 7.03 ± 3.32        | 8.18 ± 4.2  |     |                     |               |               |                                     |             |
| $p$ value             |                    |                    |             |     |                     |               |               |                                     |             |
|                       | 0.779†             |                    |             |     |                     |               |               |                                     |             |
|                       | 0.259†             |                    |             |     |                     |               |               |                                     |             |
|                       | 0.447†             |                    |             |     |                     |               |               |                                     |             |
|                       | 0.742†             |                    |             |     |                     |               |               |                                     |             |
|                       | 0.272†             |                    |             |     |                     |               |               |                                     |             |

aData are presented as mean ± SD or counts (%). †Kruskal-Wallis test. ‡Chi-square test. §Chi-square test for trend.

Fig. 1 Correlation of BMI and Stage of Endometriosis
displayed an inverse gradient from less to more educated groups ($p = 0.002$) which is in line with the study of Lassale et al. [19].

Underweight participants more frequently have grades III and IV of the disease, while overweight patients more frequently have grade I endometriosis ($p = 0.021$). This is in line with the findings of the majority of other authors [4, 12, 18]. Furthermore, Missmer et al. showed that BMI was associated with the incidence of endometriosis [18], while Moini et al. consider that BMI may be regarded as predictive factors not only for any type of endometriosis but also for severe ones [4]. In contrast, Hemmings et al. did not show any significant correlation between BMI and endometriosis [20]. However, they had different inclusion criteria in terms of a broad spectrum of preoperative indications (infertility, pelvic pain, pelvic mass, and others) and applied type of surgery (laparoscopy/laparotomy, tubal ligation/reanastomosis, hysterectomy). Besides, BMI showed a highly significant inverse correlation with endometriosis grade as infertile women with lower BMI tend to have the more severe form of the disease ($p < 0.001$). This finding was in agreement with studies by Calhaz-Jorge et al. [12], an Italian group [21] and Hediger et al. [22] study and could be explained with the fact that the severity of endometriosis is correlated with peripheral body fat distribution [5]. Underweight and normal weight patients had less frequently extensive surgical treatment (cystectomy of the endometriomas) comparing with overweight patients, due to fall in prevalence of moderate and severe endometriosis grades with increasing BMI.

The doses of used gonadotropins did not significantly differ between study groups. In contrast, most studies agree that the increase in BMI is related with the increased amount of gonadotropins used in the process of COS [1]. While some studies find the significant difference in the quantity of the used gonadotropins in both antagonists, as well as in agonist protocol [23], the other finds this significance only in antagonist protocol [14]. Unlike our study, the mentioned studies evaluated the impact of BMI on the applied amount of gonadotropins among women with different causes of infertility. This may indicate the different impact of BMI on ovarian response to COS in endometriosis patients, particularly if

### Table 3 Characteristics of IVF treatment and outcome according to BMI

| Body mass index groups | Underweight | Normal weight | Overweight | $p$ value |
|------------------------|-------------|---------------|------------|-----------|
| No of started cycles   | 16 (10.26%) | 111 (71.15%)  | 29 (18.59%)| NA        |
| Stimulation duration (in days) | 10.31 ± 1.08 | 9.83 ± 1.48  | 10.83 ± 2.05| 0.009 $^\dagger$ |
| GnRH-a                 | 6 (37.5%)   | 50 (45.04%)   | 12 (41.37%)| 0.821 $^\dagger$ |
| GnRH-an                | 10 (62.5%)  | 61 (54.96%)   | 17 (58.63%)|            |
| $E_2$ on triggering day (pmol/ml) | 6.158 ± 2.836 | 5.673 ± 2.769 | 5.244 ± 2.876 | 0.599 $^\dagger$ |
| Total gonadotropin dose (IU) | 3.134 ± 1.034 | 3.019 ± 0.987 | 3.240 ± 1.252 | 0.580 $^\dagger$ |
| Cancelled cycles       | 0 (0%)      | 3 (1.92%)     | 1 (0.64%)  | 0.626 $^\dagger$ |
| Retrieved oocytes      | 6.13 ± 4.13 | 6.26 ± 3.36   | 6.25 ± 3.06| 0.880 $^\dagger$ |
| GQ oocytes             | 3.50 ± 2.22 | 3.97 ± 2.44   | 4.25 ± 2.22| 0.476 $^\dagger$ |
| Quality of embryos     |             |               |            |           |
| Top                    | 2.38 ± 1.56 | 2.90 ± 1.92   | 2.50 ± 1.54| 0.578 $^\dagger$ |
| Good                   | 1.90 ± 1.60 | 2.02 ± 1.29   | 1.47 ± 0.61| 0.306 $^\dagger$ |
| Poor                   | 2.00        | 1.54 ± 0.88   | 1.50 ± 0.71| NA        |
| Bad                    | 1.00        | 1.00          | 1.00       | NA        |
| Transferred embryos    | 2.13 ± 0.89 | 1.93 ± 1.15   | 2.22 ± 0.93| 0.589 $^\dagger$ |
| Total No of embryos    | 4.17 ± 1.83 | 3.67 ± 2.51   | 3.94 ± 2.01| 0.706 $^\dagger$ |
| Without ET             | 1 (6.25%)   | 19 (17.11%)   | 2 (6.89%)  | 0.502 $^\dagger$ |
| ET Cleavage (day2)     | 9 (56.25%)  | 58 (52.52%)   | 16 (55.17%)| 0.502 $^\dagger$ |
| ET Blastocyst stage    | 0 (0%)      | 3 (2.7%)      | 2 (6.89%)  |           |
| Biochemical Pregnancy Rate | 5 (31.25%)  | 45 (40.54%)   | 13 (44.82%)| 0.298 $^\dagger$ |
| Clinical Pregnancy Rate| 5 (31.25%)  | 43 (38.73%)   | 11 (37.93%)| 0.770 $^\dagger$ |
| Ongoing Pregnancy Rate | 5 (31.25%)  | 39 (35.13%)   | 11 (37.93%)| 0.822 $^\dagger$ |

$^\dagger$Number with % in brackets or mean ± SD or %. $^\dagger$ANOVA. $^\dagger$Chi-square. $^\dagger$Kruskal-Wallis test. NA non applicable
our results. Furthermore, inferior ovarian response is
metriosis with previous ovarian surgery and ovarian re-
together with detrimental relationship between endo-
ously surgically treated participants with higher BMI,
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ance with Wittemer et al. who observed significantly
higher with the increase of BMI. This is not in accord-
number of transferred embryos, these figures were
between the groups in the number of good quality oocytes,
Women with stage III-IV of endometriosis have fewer oo-
cytes retrieved compared to women with stage I-II of the
disease [29].

Several reasons necessitate assessment of BMI influ-
ence on IVF outcome among non-obese women with
endometriosis. The largest number of women undergo-
ig IVF falls into the category of non-obese women.
Besides, endometriosis is inversely related with early
adult BMI, unlike most other infertility causes, in which
higher BMI decreases reproductive chances [5]. Finally,
understanding the impact of BMI on the IVF outcomes
in endometriosis women would allow counseling of
patients regarding the achievement of ideal BMI prior to
the procedure, as part of the individual approach in the
infertility treatment.

The previous studies demonstrated negative correlation
between BMI and the number of oocytes retrieved in gen-
eral population of women undergoing IVF [14, 27, 28].
Furthermore, even when divided into underweight, nor-
mal weight, overweight group, the underweight women
have more oocyte retrieved [28]. Still, our results aroused
from the analysis of IVF treatment of women with endo-
metriosis as sole infertility factor were unable to confirm
this relationship. Paradoxically, underweight women, who
were significantly younger then overweight and normal
weight patients, had the lower mean number of retrieved
oocytes, although this difference did not reach statistical
significance. Possible explanation could be higher preva-
ience of stage III and IV endometriosis observed among
underweight participants compared to other study groups.
Women with stage III-IV of endometriosis have fewer oo-
cytes retrieved compared to women with stage I-II of the
disease [29].

Although significant differences were not found be-
tween the groups in the number of good quality oocytes,
total number of embryos, number of GQ embryos and
number of transferred embryos, these figures were
higher with the increase of BMI. This is not in accord-
ance with Wittemer et al. who observed significantly
lower number of good quality oocytes in overweight and
underweight patients comparing to normally weighted
women [14]. Significantly lower number of our previ-
sely surgically treated participants with higher BMI,
together with detrimental relationship between endo-
metriosis with previous ovarian surgery and ovarian re-
serve reported by Matallioutakis et al. [30], could explain
our results. Furthermore, inferior ovarian response is
more likely present among the subjects with grade III
and IV endometriosis [31, 32], which were significantly
more prevalent among our participants with lower BMI.
Nevertheless, additional explanation of our findings is
necessary since Opoien et al. did not find differences in
the fraction of mature cumulus-oocyte complexes be-
tween ASRM III-IV and ASRM I-II groups [29].

Significant differences in biochemical, clinical and on-
going pregnancy rates between BMI groups were not
found, which is in line with the other studies [14, 33, 34],
but in contrast to the study of Marci et al. who found
higher clinical pregnancies rates in patients with normal
BMI comparing to overweight women [23]. When exam-
ined as a main variable alone, BMI does not appear to
have a significant effect on IVF outcomes, but BMI x age
interaction analysis reveals a marked decrease in preg-
nancy rates with increasing BMI for patients younger than
27 years of age [35]. Surprisingly, although did not reach
the statistical significance, our pregnancy rates were
higher with increased BMI values, despite the fact that the
average age was the lowest in underweight and the highest
in overweight participants.

The strength of the current study is the cautiously
chosen homogeneous group of patients, which lessens
potential confounders. Furthermore, participants showed
fertility difficulties before laparoscopic surgery, conse-
quentially fertility problems were not necessarily due to
the possible effect of surgery. Besides, endometriosis
patients undergoing IVF in tertiary referral centers (as
our clinic) usually do not differ from endometriosis pa-
tients in non-referral centers and general practices and
in this sense external validity of the study is fulfilled.
Moreover, we initially addressed the topic where no
study has ever been done before and delivered informa-
tion for further definitive studies and provided up-to-
date data, needed for the calculation of the sample size
for the future main trials. Additionally, contemporary
medicine is focused both on the ideal therapeutic
approach and on counseling the patient towards behav-
iors that optimize the effect of applied treatment. The
example is the advice to obese and overweight women
for the reduction of BMI prior to IVF treatment to
achieve the higher pregnancy rates. However, this rec-
ommendation stemmed from studies performed in gen-
eral population of infertile women. We often advise
patients according to known facts concerning the gen-
eral population of women, regardless to characteristics
of a patient or a disease. Simultaneously, modern medi-
cine favors customized approach, both in relation to the
patient and in accordance to the type or severity of a
disease or condition (e.g. endometriosis and infertility).
For that reason, it is important to test if facts established
for general populations are proper for each type of
patient or infertility cause. Future prospective studies
could give answer whether it is appropriate to advice overweight women with endometriosis to lose weight prior to IVF, which we often routinely do? Today we are aware that weight related issues, food and nutrients influence pathogenesis and progression of endometriosis. Therefore, dietary practices and lifestyle behaviors are becoming alternative and adjuvant treatments to combat the disease and its consequences, such as infertility [36].

We are aware that the strict inclusion criteria applied lead to a relatively small number of overweight participants and we acknowledge this as limitation of our study. Nevertheless, the study sample is highly homogenous and almost all confound factors that could lead to bias are therefore eliminated. Limitation of the study could be retrospective design, with issues as different assessment of the pelvis and the stage of the disease, different surgical and IVF approach to endometriosis patients. Nevertheless, participants underwent all procedures in our clinic, where the stuff of the Laparoscopy and IVF departments was stable during the study period and where the procedures for endometriosis patients were not considerably changed over the analyzed period. Besides, disease was staged by the same classification system. Further limitation is related to the fact that BMI should not be the single indicator of weight related health and reproductive issues. It does not distinguish android and gynaecoid fat distribution or regional fat distribution. Still, BMI represents a simple and consistent measure that has been individually and steadily related with numerous clinical endpoints.

**Conclusions**

Our preliminary results do not support the hypothesis that higher BMI among non-obese endometriosis patients improve IVF outcomes. However, the increase in BMI did not adversely affect the outcomes of IVF either, which is in contrast to literature data as regards general population of infertile women undergoing IVF. Perceived differences between our preliminary data and most of the literature data refer to important IVF outcomes, such as gonadotrophin doses, number of retrieved oocytes, retrieved GC oocytes, total number of obtained embryos, number of GQ embryos, and achieved pregnancy rates. Therefore, we believe that careful consideration of our results could initiate further evaluation of this topic. Prospective studies with large number of patients with endometriosis or prospective case-control studies should address these issues and provide more comprehensive counseling of infertile endometriosis patients regarding achievement of optimal BMI prior to IVF with the intention of achievement higher pregnancy rates.

**Abbreviations**

AFC: Antral follicle count; AMH: Anti-Müllerian hormone; ANOVA: Analysis of variance; ASRM: The American Society of Reproductive Medicine; BMI: Body mass index; COS: Controlled ovarian stimulation; E2: Estradiol; ET: Embryo transfer; FSH: Follicle-stimulating hormone; GnRH: Gonadotropin-releasing hormone; GnRH-a: GnRH agonist; GnRH-an: GnRH antagonist; GQ: Good quality; hCG: Human chorionic gonadotropin; IVF: In vitro fertilization

**Acknowledgements**

The authors acknowledge the support provided by Dr. Stefan Mandić-Rađojević (Department of Health Sciences, University of Milan, Italy) in reviewing this paper.

**Funding**

None

**Availability of data and materials**

Data available on request from the authors.

**Disclosure of any source of financial support of the study**

None

**Authors’ contributions**

EG: study design, data interpretation, revising the manuscript; BA: data collection, data interpretation, writing the manuscript; JR: data collection, data interpretation, writing the manuscript; DBJ: data collection, data interpretation, writing the manuscript; DL: data collection, data interpretation, writing the manuscript; BM: study design, data collection, data interpretation, statistical analysis, writing the manuscript; IS: data interpretation, statistical analysis, writing the manuscript; MP: study design, data collection, data interpretation, statistical analysis, writing the manuscript, revising the manuscript, supervision of the research group. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

**Ethics approval and consent to participate**

This study was approved by the Institutional review board (decision No.24/10–3) prior to data collection. Institutional review board approved the study without patient’s informed consent due to retrospective design of study and because study involved only evaluation of existing data, recorded before the study start. Furthermore, all data was collected with respect of patient’s privacy and anonymity. Database does not include any identifiable information.

**Consent for publication**

Not applicable

**Competing interests**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Received: 4 January 2017 Accepted: 31 October 2017 Published online: 16 November 2017

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