University of Huddersfield Repository

Golding, Berenice

A friend, a father, or both?

Original Citation


This version is available at http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/2795/

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

- The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
- A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
- The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk.

http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/
A friend, a father, or both?

31 October 2008

By Berenice Golding
PhD Student, University of Huddersfield

Appeared in BioNews 482

Commenting on the recent article in BioNews, which reported that half of women would ask a friend to father their child if they had no partner (1), I wish to raise the following points for consideration.

The Vitabiotics survey this was based on reported that over half of the women surveyed were worried about not finding 'Mr Right' in time and would consider asking a friend to father their child, with women in the age group 28-31 more likely to consider this option (2). A further emerging trend was that women would choose alternative methods of conceiving in the absence of a suitable partner (2, 3). For many women, a treatment such as donor insemination (DI) is usually a last resort. However, it appears that at least in some instances it is being seen as the first resort (3). But what implications, if any, do the results of this survey have for the UK population?

The fact that women are thinking about their fertility at a younger age is a positive trend. However, the numbers of women who would consider asking a friend to father their child does raise some concerns.

Friendships are not static entities, they sometimes break down; therefore to change a friendship into a relationship that includes children has the potential to cause many problems. Arguably this may be no different to the issues faced in a long term relationship; there are however, subtle differences.

Usually women seeking DI would gain access to donor sperm via a licensed treatment centre. They then have the assurance that the sperm has been thoroughly screened in accordance with HFEA guidelines (4). In the absence of such screening there is the possibility that genetic/hereditary conditions may be passed on, particularly since friends do not always tell each other everything. This may lead to important medical issues being overlooked due to the absence of routine screening, an issue which again may be applicable to long-term relationships.

Women also need to think about what they would tell a child should a birth take place. Considerations should include; how the child's paternity is explained, and what role - if any - the friend will play - will he be a father by name only, a 'hands on dad' or just a friend of the family?

The child should be informed, at an age when they can understand, about the facts of their
biological parentage; openness about their genetic heritage is to be favoured and encouraged, and it is in the best interest of the child. It is also much easier if they are told at an early age, rather than finding out by chance (5), particularly if the friend’s details are recorded on the birth certificate.

By law men who donate sperm via a licensed centre are not regarded as a legal parent (6). However, men donating informally may in some circumstances be regarded as the legal parent (7). This could mean that the friend may be obliged by law to have his details recorded on the child’s birth certificate - a failure to do so may result in a fine for both parties (8) - and may also impose a legal obligation on him to contribute financially towards the upbringing of the child (9). It may therefore be beneficial to set clearly defined parameters prior to the birth regarding the friend's role in the child's life, including what contact he might have, this should also consider the future.

The fact that the friend is single at the time does not mean he will be single forever. This means that any potential family he may have in the future would need informing that he is already a parent. Any child(ren) born from this new union would need to be told that they have half-sibling(s). Indeed the half-siblings may have an interest in getting to know one another; this openness may prevent the development of a consanguineous relationship later in life.

My suggestion is that women who might consider asking a friend to father their child, should think carefully about the possible ramifications before proceeding. What appears to be, at first, a simple solution, may not actually be as straightforward as anticipated.

**SOURCES & REFERENCES**

1) Katy Sinclair, 'Half of women would ask a friend to father their child'
   BioNews | 22 September 2008

2) David Rose, 'Half of women would ask man friend to father child'
   The Times | 16 September 2008

3) Viv Groskop, 'I wanted a child more than a man'
   The Guardian | 17 September 2008

4) Human Fertilisation & Embryology Authority Code of Practice (7th ed., 2007)

5) Vasanti Jadva, Tabitha Freeman, Wendy Kramer and Susan Golombok, 'Age of disclosure and donor offspring’s feelings about finding out they were donor conceived' (2008)

6) Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 S 28(6)

7) HFEA, 'Donating sperm, eggs or embryos' (2007)
Fathers or donors? The legal position of friends who act as informal sperm donors
08 December 2008 - by Natalie Gamble
I read with interest the article in BioNews and reply commentary from Berenice Golding about the recent Vitabiotics survey finding that over half of women would consider asking a friend to father their child. As a solicitor who has represented many single women and lesbian couples conceiving with 'friends' as...[Read More]

Half of women would ask a friend to father their child
22 September 2008 - by Katy Sinclair
A survey of 3,103 men and women, conducted by vitamin supplement company Vitabiotics, has found that 45 per cent of women surveyed would consider asking a male friend to father their child in the absence of a suitable partner. The report by the company reveals that both...[Read More]

HAVE YOUR SAY

Be the first to have your say.

By posting a comment you agree to abide by the BioNews terms and conditions

Syndicate this story- click here to enquire about using this story.