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Can women consent to share their eggs?

Women who face difficulties conceiving a child may consider various treatments, including 'egg sharing'. But is it a practical, socially acceptable and ethical treatment option?

1. Society and Infertility

Infertility affects 1 in 7 couples in the United Kingdom.

Society expects women to have children, when this does not happen naturally it causes distress.

In vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatment/s may be the only way of possibly overcoming infertility. But at what cost?

Many of these treatments, including egg sharing, have their critics, but why?

2. Egg sharing – The Treatment

Egg sharing is a fertility treatment that has been available in the UK since the 1990s.

Women who need fertility treatment may agree to egg share. They agree to share half their eggs with another woman having treatment. In return the donor gets access to cheaper, quicker treatment.

Over 2000 children have been born as a result of egg sharing in the UK.

3. Egg sharing – Society's Response

Thirty years ago the world was amazed at the birth of the first test-tube baby but the procedure raised many questions.

Since egg sharing has become available questions have been asked about what motivates women who agree to become egg share donors.

Could it be that the desire to have a child is so strong that women will agree to any treatment without really considering the impact it may have on them and their families in the future?

If I share my eggs do I reduce my chances of success?



Can I consent for the right reasons???



If I share my eggs I can get cheaper, quicker treatment.



If I share my eggs I can help another couple.



Is it for me?
How can I decide what to do?



What is egg sharing?



Private

NHS



4. Why this research is important

To date not much research has been undertaken that focuses on the experiences of egg share donors. This study will help to fill this gap by trying to find some answers to the current controversies.

Egg share donors will be asked about their understanding of the consent process and what motivated them to donate.

The study will explore what impact their decision has had on the donors themselves and their families.

5. The Ethical issues raised by Egg Sharing

Women may have no choice if it means no further treatment – their consent is therefore compromised.

Women are not really donating their eggs – reduced price treatment means that it is not a donation.

Donors may not be successful with their own treatment but the recipient might be.

Can a woman legitimately agree to share her eggs with another woman?

6. The Social Implications of Egg Sharing

Egg sharing creates genetically-related half siblings who will be brought up in different families.

In years to come donor-conceived children at the age of 18 may set out to find their genetic mother.

Some donors will have to live knowing that a child, genetically related to them was born because they chose to help another woman by egg sharing.

Society may need to identify new ways of describing these new family units.

