

Eggs and Embryos for Research Summary and Update

Spring 2015

Background

In the Canadian context, there are both strict regulations about how the donation of embryos to research can take place and limited information about the factors that contribute to embryo disposition decision-making. Clinicians, researchers, and policymakers are left without clear guidance about what patients want, and how they think about the donation of their embryos to research.

Research summary

What was the goal of the research?

This research aimed to identify assisted human reproduction patients' views about the donation of embryos for scientific and clinical research. These interviews gave us new information about how Canadian women and couples make decisions about what to do with their embryos in storage, and the acceptability of using these embryos for scientific and clinical research.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers interviewed 45 patients from three different clinic sites, Halifax, Montreal, and Ottawa. People were interviewed either one-on-one or in couples in person, by telephone or over Skype following participating in a demographic questionnaire. The interview questions focused on participants' perceptions, views, and understandings in relation to the donation of embryos to research.

What did participants decide to do with their surplus embryos?

	Number of Interviews*	Number of Participants
Renew (keep in storage)	16	21
Used all embryos	5	6
Donate to a third party	0	0
Retain permanently	1	2
Discard	3	3
Use for research and/or clinical training	11	13
Totals	36	45

*number of interviews is less than number of participants as some couples were interviewed together

What did the researchers find?

This research aimed to answer two important questions...

What are the views of women and couples in Canadian IVF programs donating their *in vitro* embryos for research?

Most people interviewed by the research team had not yet decided what to do with their embryos in storage, or were planning to use them at some point in the future. Among people who did decide to donate their embryos to research, there were three key ideas that they discussed: wanting to “give back” in some way, wanting to contribute to scientific progress, and to avoid “wasting” their embryos. Women and couples who chose research as a disposition option often described a combination of these ideas as contributing to decision-making.

What are the beliefs and values that underlie these perceptions, views and understandings?

The people who chose to donate their embryos to research often expressed positive feelings about the clinic and about IVF more generally. Like most participants in the study, they had a child (or children) via IVF. Several of these people also expressed positive feelings about science or medical research, either because of their own experience, or because they believed in the potential for their embryos to contribute to new developments, particularly in reproductive medicine.

Publications and Presentations

Selected Publications

Snow D., Baylis F. & Downie J. (2015). Why the Government of Canada won't regulate assisted human reproduction: A modern mystery. Under review with the McGill Journal of Law and Health.

Doyle A. & Cattapan A. Patient preferences in embryo disposition. Submitted to *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Canada*, January 2015.

Baylis F., Downie J. & Snow D. (2014) Fake it till you make it: Policymaking and assisted human reproduction in Canada. *Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology Canada* 36 (6); 510-512.

McLeod C. & Botterell A. (2014) Raising Expectations about IVF but not Adoption. *Impact Ethics*.

Baylis F. & Downie J. (2013) The tale of Assisted Human Reproduction Canada: A tragedy in five acts. *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 25(2): 183-201.

Selected Presentations

Reproductive biobanking for research (Workshop), Dalhousie University, December 2014.

Patients' decision-making on the disposition of frozen surplus embryos. OBGYN Journal Club Presentation. IWK Health Centre, November 2014.

Cryopreserved embryos in Canada: Implications for future research. CFAS Annual Meeting, Quebec City, September 2014.

Should your tax dollars pay for IVF? Café Scientifique, Halifax, NS. May 13, 2014.

The investigators for this research include: Françoise Baylis, Dalhousie University; Erica Haines, Newcastle University, UK; Erin Fredericks, St. Thomas University; Carolyn McLeod, University of Western Ontario; Arthur Leader, University of Ottawa; Janet Takefman, McGill University

Researchers and Postdoctoral Fellows for this research include: Tamara Browne, Australian National University; Alana Cattapan, Dalhousie University; Stephanie Côté, Université de Montréal; Ashley Doyle, Dalhousie University; Ryan Tonkens, Monash University; and Pamela White, University of Kent.

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For more information visit: www.dal.ca/sites/noveltechethics/projects/eggs-and-embryos.html