

lied to and the parent-child relationship is strained. This leaves a legacy of distrust, with 47% of them declaring that their mother might have lied about important matters when they were growing up. This compares with 27% for those who were adopted and 18% for those who were raised by their biological parents. Similar results were given for worrying that their father might have lied.

Not surprisingly, a substantial majority of adults conceived through sperm donation expressed support for their right to know everything. This included the identity of the donor and the right to have some kind of relationship with him. They also said they wanted to know about the existence and number of their half-siblings. As it now stands, the law in the United States does not give them any of these rights. In fact, it protects the donors and fertility clinics at the cost of the children conceived.

But the problems do not end with secrecy. The survey results showed that 44% of the donor-conceived adults were comfortable with donor conception so long as parents tell their children the truth, preferably from an early age. Nevertheless, 36% had concerns about it even if parents told the truth, and 11% said it is hard for kids even if parents handle the issue well.

In fact, the report commented that: "openness alone does not appear to resolve the potential losses, confusion and risks that can come with deliberately conceiving children so that they will be raised lacking at least one of their biological parents."

The report concluded with a series of recommendations. Among them was the

observation that no other medical procedure has such enormous implications for a person who did not seek the treatment -- the offspring. And they asked: "Does a good society intentionally create children in this way?" A question well worth reflecting on.

This article has been selected from the  
ZENIT Daily Dispatch  
© Innovative Media, Inc. Rome, June 13,  
2010

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Pamphlet 633

## The Consequences of Sperm Donation

Father John Flynn, LC

The constant increase in artificial insemination and the use of sperm donors means there is a growing number of children who are in the dark about the identity of their biological father. A recent report looked into the implications of this for the lives of those who have now reached adulthood.

The Commission on Parenthood's Future released the study. Titled "My Daddy's Name is Donor: A New Study of Young Adults Conceived Through Sperm Donation," it was co-authored by Elizabeth Marquardt, Norval D. Glenn and Karen Clark.

According to the study, between 30,000 and 60,000 children are born each year in the United States through sperm donation. This is, however, only an educated guess, as there is no agency that collects statistics on such procedures. Moreover, this is the first serious study to evaluate the well-being of those who are now adults. The report also commented that sperm donation is an international phenomenon. People from around the world seek sperm donors in the United States due to the lack of any regulations, and countries such as Denmark, India and South Africa also provide sperm donors to a flourishing market of fertility tourism.

The authors made an interesting comparison between sperm donation and

adoption. Adoption is governed by strict rules, and adoptive parents are carefully studied before being able to adopt. When it comes to sperm donation, however, women shop for donors in online catalogs that compare physical qualities, intelligence and professional accomplishments, and all they need to do is pay for the transaction.

Regarding the comparison with adoption, the authors noted that quite frequently their friends and colleagues commented to them that sperm donation is just like adoption. For a start, this fails to take into account the difficulties that many adopted children face in terms of being separated from their biological origins, the report replied. In addition, adopted children can take comfort from thinking that perhaps their mother gave them up only after a difficult struggle or due to extreme circumstances. With donor conception the offspring realizes that it was just a commercial transaction without any thought on the part of the donor about them.

Hurt

To study the situation of adults conceived through sperm donation the authors surveyed more than a million households and then assembled a representative sample of 485 adults between the ages of 18 and 45 who said their mother used a sperm donor. They were compared with a group of 562 adults who were adopted as infants, and 563 adults raised by their biological parents.

"We learned that, on average, young adults conceived through sperm donation are hurting more, are more confused and feel

more isolated from their families," the report stated.

No less than 65% of donor-conceived adults in the survey agreed with the statement: "My sperm donor is half of who I am." Even the mothers admit to being curious about who is the father of their child.

Just under half of the donor adults expressed discomfort about their origins, with many of them saying it is a frequent concern that they feel. Some of them felt like freaks -- the result of lab experiments -- while others struggled with identity issues. The fact that money was involved in the process was also a cause of concern for many. Others expressed discomfort about being a product made to satisfy their parent's wishes. And no less than 70% admit that they wonder what their sperm donor's family is like.

The concerns of donor offspring are not limited to issues of identity and family, but extend to medical worries. The report pointed out that some donors have fathered dozens of children, and there are even cases of a hundred or more. So the donor adults are worried about unknowingly dating a half-sibling, or that their children may date the child of a half-sibling.

The issue of anonymous sperm donation has been a hot topic in many countries in recent years. Criticism of the practice has led Britain, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and some parts of Australia and New Zealand to ban it, the report noted. In the United States and Canada, however, there are no such restrictions. The Catholic Church is strongly

opposed to all practices of artificial insemination, but as the report makes clear even if you don't agree with such a stance, there are very good reasons to stand up for the right of children to know who their father is and to put an end to anonymous parenthood.

The survey also examined social and psychological issues. Asked if before the age of 25 they had trouble with the law, 21% of donor offspring said yes. The corresponding figures for adopted children and children who grew up with their biological parents were 18% and 11% respectively. Similar results were reported for problems of alcohol or substance abuse. These results remain constant even when the results are controlled for socio-economic status and other variables.

Regarding the variable factors, one interesting bit of data that came out of the survey was that 36% of donor offspring said they were raised as Catholics, compared to 22% from adoptive families, and 28% raised by their biological parents. This is a striking finding, the report commented, given the opposition by the Catholic Church to such practices. Moreover, 32% of donor adults said that Catholicism is still their religion. By contrast, a larger number of Catholics in the other two control groups have left the Church.

Secrecy

Another difficulty sperm donor offspring suffer is the secrecy about their origins. In most cases, parents let the child believe that he or she is biologically related to both of them in the beginning. Then, when the child finally discovers the truth, the child feels