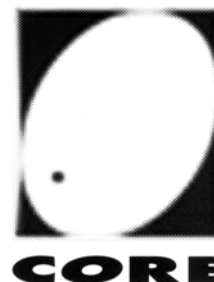


HUMAN EGG TRAFFICKING IN EUROPE

Summary of Internet Research on IVF Clinics in Europe involved in Egg Donation



My presentation summarises preliminary research obtained from the Internet in order to acquire a better overview of egg donation programmes for infertile couples in Europe. I have looked into issues of payment, information of donors about risks, legislative settings and transparency which are the most controversial aspects of human egg trafficking.

Legal environment

An immediate general impression of egg donation in Europe is apparent. Eastern European countries - which in most cases have no IVF legislation to cover gamete donation - are being targeted for egg donation. The laws are currently in legislative process only in some countries. Given the considerable ethical controversy involved their adoption is often procrastinated e.g. Slovakia or Lithuania.

Western European clinics, as well as US-based clinics, set up their branches in Eastern Europe in order to procure human eggs for their clients in the West. There is no overarching European legislation, though the European Consortium on Assisted Conception set up by ESHRE last year is aiming at harmonisation of national legislations, but possibly to enable more human egg trafficking.

An example of how restrictive legislation can be side-stepped can be clearly demonstrated in the case of IVF clinic **Kinderwunschzentrum** based in Vienna, where egg donation is prohibited. The clinic therefore refers its clients for egg donation to Bratislava, where its branch was opened last year - only 60 km away from Vienna. IVF and egg donation are unregulated at the present in Slovakia.

A different example is **Jinemed Hospital** Istanbul which openly states on its website: *“Egg and sperm donation is not legal in Turkey. Therefore we cannot do these programs in Istanbul, however we have associated clinics in northern Cyprus and Greece. We can prepare the patients for this procedure. Under our guidance and supervision, we will send you to these clinics. Average medical cost is 6000 euro for egg donation...”*

Payment for Eggs

Two IVF clinics (Crete, Larissa) which officially pay donors are situated in Greece.

The biggest provider of eggs in Europe seems to be **Spain** where tens of clinics advertise egg donation for payment **up to 1000 euro**. Most clinics are not on Internet, just the most prestigious, very modern ones. **Instituto Marques** in Barcelona offers a unique egg-donation refunding program where 75% of all costs (including treatment, medication & donor fees) are returned if pregnancy is not achieved. It cooperates with a US network IHR, which refers its US clients to Spain.

E.g. the Latvian **Embrions** offers egg donation for 3,600 Euro compared to £7,900 – 11,000 at **The Bridge Clinic** in London. The Bridge Centre clinic works with partners in Crete and Ukraine (Kiev) and used to work with **Global ART** clinic in Bucharest, Romania, which some say is now reopened.

In the UK the recommendation of the HFEA for the **compensation for egg donation** has increased from **£50 to £250** last year. The EU Tissue Directive does not allow for any payment. The donors are usually awarded in different way (holidays, gadgets, etc.) on top of this financial “compensation”.

Transparency

In general, the egg donation programmes are not widely advertised, but surrounded by secrecy. Most of IVF clinics such as **Fertimed**, Olomouc (Czech Republic), **Evangelismo Hospital**, Paphos (Cyprus), **Fertility School**, Copenhagen (Denmark), **American Hospital**, Paris (France), **Fertility Center**, Crete (Greece), **Novum and Invimed**, Warsaw (Poland), **Neplodnost**, Ljubljana (Slovenia) do not mention egg donation programme at their official websites in English. This information is sometimes available only at the website in the local language. In any case further information comes to light by tracking internet groups discussing IVF and gamete donation, such as www.fertilityfriends.co.uk.

In Turkey, where some clinics seeks egg donors, there is neither a good internet coverage on these programmes, nor available from the clinics themselves.

Information about risks

The practice of informing women about the procedure and risks varies. Most of clinics have no information published on their websites. OHSS is mentioned by **The Bridge Clinic**, London, **CRM**, London, **Clinica Tambre**, Madrid, **Instituto Cefer**, Barcelona, Iraga, La Coruna, **Embrions**, Riga, **Fertimed**, Olomouc, however, the risk to life is ignored and serious complications played down (1% of cases).

At another extreme we find **FecundMED**, Barcelona, claiming that there is no pain in the process of egg donation.

Networks word-wide

The US network **Reproductive Genetics** operates in post-Soviet countries such as Belarus, Ukraine, etc., where it targets young girls as egg donors. Uniquely, it is only its Cypriot branch that openly admits cooperation with embryonic stem cell researchers at Reproductive Genetics Institute, closely affiliated with Stemride International Ltd. The London branch of Reproductive Genetics is headed by Dr Taranissi.

Under the name **Fertimed** several IVF clinics can be searched out, in particular in: Bielsko Biala (Poland - <http://www.ivf-polska.de>), Olomouc (Czech Republic) and Hamburg (Germany).

A Danish network **Nordica** deserves attention for it has extended its influence not only into European cities such as Kaunas (Lithuania), but also out of continent into Kampala (Uganda), Abuha (Nigeria), Lagos (Nigeria), Brenthurst (South Africa), Lenmed (South Africa), Pretoria (South Africa). It claims access to research findings from **The Institute of Human Reproduction Symbion**, Fruebjergvej, Denmark (a research centre) and **The Fertility Clinic of Copenhagen University** at Herlev Hospital, Copenhagen, Denmark. There is nothing on OHSS mentioned at its website. An egg donation programme in Finland is run by **IPPF**.

IVF Industry & Woman's Health

This research points out the “market” expansion of IVF industry in Europe with a new service “egg conception” to attract the “market segment” of infertile women. Women get so desperate to have children that they are willing to pay for conception of a baby who has even a different genetic mother. As a part of the industry’s marketing egg donors are portrayed as generous women ignoring concerns for their health or dignity.

While the industry takes advantage of the non-existence of regulation and legislation, public perceptions are gradually changing till there is a sufficient pressure to overhaul legislation and legalise all procedures in assisted reproduction, as we have witnessed in the United Kingdom. Legislation does not anchor ethical principles anymore in the field of reproduction, but justifies totalitarian consumerism. Consumer’s choice has become the only ethical principle. So if woman can afford to pay for donated eggs, she cannot be prevented, but the state should enable it and provide for it for her. This is an ultimatum of today. Sadly, these women usually act in fear to keep their partner. They need to be empowered to realise that they are worthy to be loved even infertile.

Young women often from poorer social background, for whom financial incentive is too big temptation at times, become victims of egg donation. Especially if they are fooled that the procedure is a generous and altruistic act. They have right to know about procedures and their moral, psychological, medical and social consequences. In the biotech age women’s bodies become a source of profit-making even for those who call themselves doctors and should protect their health. More attention should be drawn to the fight against abusive practices of IVF clinics which aim at exploitation and manipulation of women. This is a challenge for woman’s and feminist groups in the 21st century. We must raise voice and take action to protect vulnerable ones.

Recommendation

There is a need for more thorough research to be conducted on the basis of which specific actions can be undertaken. Various women groups should unite in this cause.

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