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A Cross-cultural Perspective on Mothers' Attitudes on Sharing Information with the Teachers on Which Child Has Been Conceived by Egg Donation

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Abstract
There is now a growing body of research examining psychological aspects of children born as a result of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs), in particular via egg donation. Some research suggests that concealment of children's biological origins may affect their psychological development. Hence, there is current debate to decide how widely details about children's conception should be disclosed to the public in particular to those involved in the education of children. Some parents maintain that the school should be informed so that teachers can offer support to children that reveal details about their origin. Others think this information should be kept private. The present study is focused on the debate as to whether the private information about the children's conception should be shared with their teachers. This will be studied from the point of view of mothers with naturally conceived children and mothers of children born as a result of egg donation. Furthermore, the topic will be investigated from a cross-cultural perspective. Mothers of children born as a result of egg donation from Iran (N =4) and Britain (N =4), overall mean age = 39.37, and 69 mothers with naturally conceived children from Iran (N = 33) and Britain (N = 36), overall mean age = 36.79, were asked if they would agree that information about how their child was born should be shared with their teachers. The results were an overwhelming disagreement from all women that this information should be shared with teachers. However, Iranian women with naturally born children differed from their British counterparts in being relatively more positive on this subject, possibly an indication that they do not agree with conception via egg donation. The implications of the results are discussed.
Keywords: Cross-cultural, Children's conception, Egg Donation, Education

1. Introduction

Ever since the announcement of the birth of Louis Brown, the first test tube baby via In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) (Steptoe & Edwards, 1978) over 4.5 million children have been born through Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) (Golombok et al., 2013). The ARTs have now revolutionised the way people can create new families (Brezina & Zhao, 2012). The ART techniques separate conception from sexual intercourse and allow a third party involvement in the reproduction process, challenging traditional family identity (Dickens, 2002).

Common ART techniques include In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) in which the gametes (egg and sperm) are handled outside the human body with the aim of achieving a healthy conception (Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, 2014) and reproductive donation which includes donation of sperm (whereby the child lacks a genetic relationship with the father) and/or eggs (resulting in the absence of a genetic link with the mother). The key difference between IVF and IVF with egg donation being that when the mother's egg and father's sperm are used in IVF and the mother undergoes the pregnancy, the parents have both a genetic and gestational link to the child in the same way as parents of naturally conceived children, however, there is a lack of genetic link when only egg donation is involved (Golombok et al., 2013).

There has been a growing body of research aimed at examining psychological, social and educational consequences of ART conception on both families and children by comparing naturally born children with those born as a result IVF or egg donation (see for example, Koivurova et al., 2003; Bonduelle et al., 2005; Knoester et al., 2007; Knoester et al., 2008; Wagenaar et al., 2009; Golombok et al., 2009; Beydoun et al., 2010 and Zhan et al., 2013). The important issue to note here is that regardless of what difference scientists report between naturally born children and those born particularly as a result of egg donation, the question remains as to what the public regards about conception via egg donation (Golombok, et al., 2013; Donor Conception Network, 2017). One topic that has been debated, but not directly examined, is whether teachers (primary schools) should be informed of which child in their class has been born as a result of egg donation. There is currently an on-going debate about this issue. For example, one position maintains "sharing information with primary school teachers can be valuable so that they can support and back-up a child who talks about their beginnings in class" (Donor Conception Network, 2017). Others have highlighted that "teachers are now more sensitive to various family constellations, as well as the many different genetic and non-genetic ways families come together"

(Parent Via Egg Donation, 2017).

According to Golombok et al. (2011) most teachers are not aware of the nature of the child's conception. Hence, it is not clear what impact it may have on teachers if they know how the child was conceived. There is to date no reported study to examine the attitudes of mothers regarding whether teachers should be informed of which child in their class has been born by egg donation. Furthermore, the extent to which cultural differences may have an impact on the attitudes, particularly Western and Middle-Eastern, could shed further light on the latter issue.

The aim of the present study is thus in two-fold: First, to put the statement regarding whether teachers should be informed of which child was born as a result of egg donation to mothers of children with egg donation and mothers who have children born through natural pregnancy. Second, to look at the above from a cross-cultural perspective i.e. Iranian vs. British. As noted by researchers e.g. Greil, Slauson-Blevins and McQuillan (2010) cultural norms and values play a significant role in attitudes towards family values and having children by ART in particular through egg donation in the West and in a Middle-Eastern country like Iran.

2. Methodology

2.1 Design

A quasi-experimental questionnaire design in which the main independent variables are cultural differences and mothers with children born naturally and via egg donation. The dependent variable is the responses to the following statement "Teachers should be informed of which children in their class have been born by egg donation" based on Likert scale measurement.

2.2 The sample group

Mothers of children born as a result of egg donation from Iran (N =4) and Britain (N =4), overall mean age = 39.37, SD = 15.34, whose child is now in their early teens and 69 mothers with naturally conceived children from Iran (N = 33) and Britain (N = 36), overall mean age = 36.79, SD=15.22.

2.3 Data collection tools

The following statement was printed on an A4 paper "Teachers should be informed of which children in their class have been born by egg donation". Under the statement there was a four point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 Strongly Agree; 2 Agree; 3 Disagree and 4 Strongly Disagree. Thus, the higher the score would imply stronger disagreement with the statement. There was also an additional space provided for any comments that respondents may wish to add about the reasons for their choice. Ethical approval was granted by Middlesex University and interviews were anonymous and no personally identifiable information was collected to ensure respondent confidentiality.

2.4 Collection of data and analysis

Data was collected in Iran and in the UK by author. The responses was recorded and subjected to statistical analysis. Furthermore, any additional comments made by the participants in response to the statement "Teachers should be informed of which children in their class have been born by egg donation": is listed below:

R-All children should be treated equally
R-Because our society is a traditional and religious country and it is likely that teachers may ignore these children
R-Nobody except parents should have this information
R-There is no difference between children no matter how they are born
R-It is not a concern for education
R-It is a personal matter
R-No reason to tell teachers
R-Unless it benefits the child
R-May needs research to decide whether children behave differently in the class depending on how they are born

3. Findings

The two figures below show Iranian and British responses to the statement "Teachers should be informed of which children in their class have been born by egg donation".

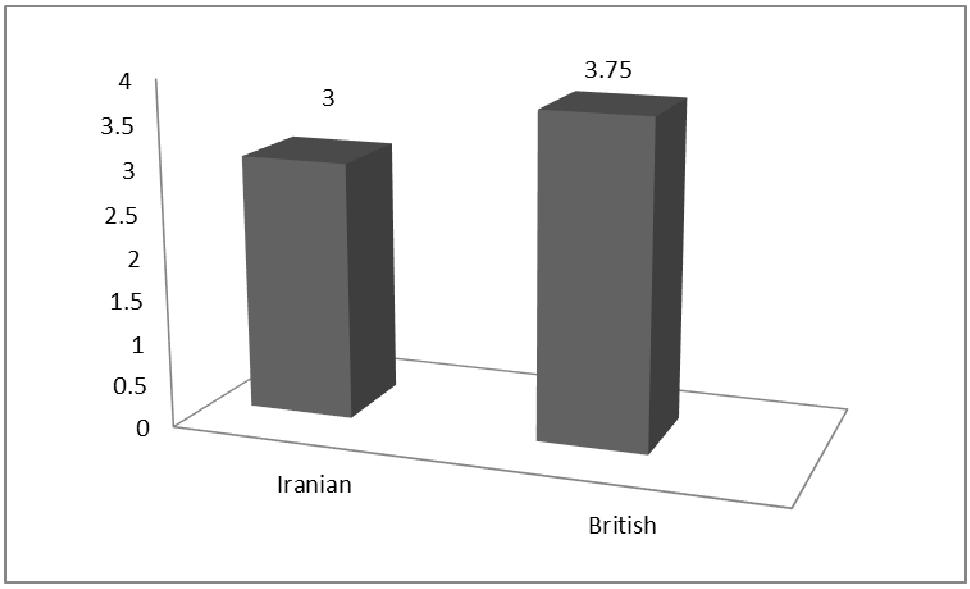

Figure 1. Responses of Iranian and British donor conceived mothers. Thus, the higher the score would imply stronger disagreement with the statement that which children in their class have been born by egg donation

Mean scores of response on the Likert scale on a scale from 1 = Strongly agree to 4 = Strongly disagree to the statement on whether teachers should be informed which child in their class is born via egg donation by Iranian (N = 4) and British (N = 4) donor conceived mothers

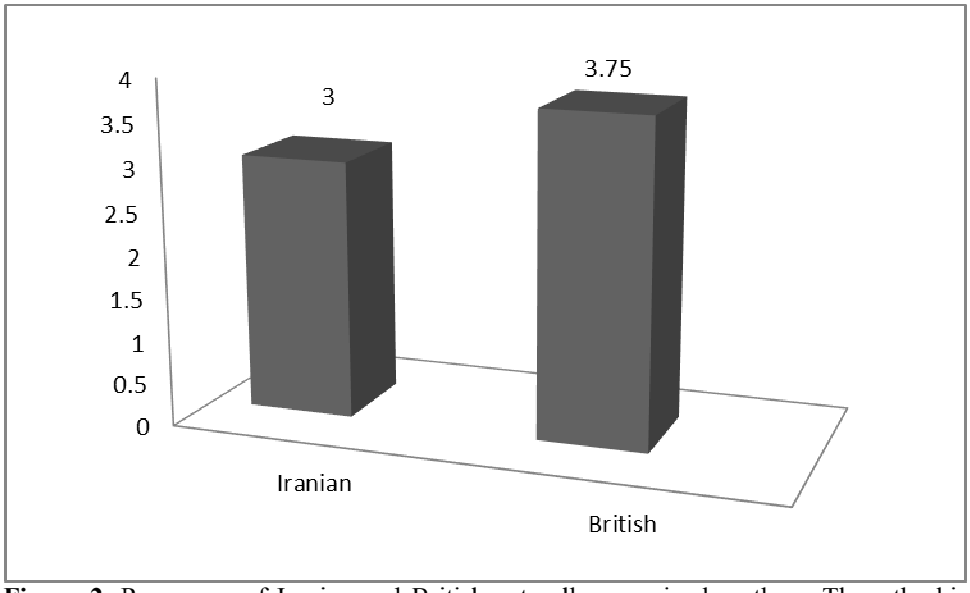

Figure 2. Responses of Iranian and British naturally conceived mothers. Thus, the higher the score would imply stronger disagreement with the statement that which children in their class have been born by egg donation.

Mean scores of responses on the Likert scale on a scale from 1 = Strongly agree to 4 = Strongly disagree to the statement on whether teachers should be informed which child in their class is born via egg donation by Iranian (N = 33) and British (N = 36) naturally conceived mothers

As can be seen in the above figures the general tendency for both cultural groups is towards disagree and strongly disagree part of the scale with an overall average of 3.3. A further point of interest, however, is that statistical analysis of data between Iranian and British mothers of naturally born children shows a significant difference with $t(67) = -3.38$, $p < 0.001$. This result indicating that British mothers disagree more strongly with sharing the information about the child's origin with the teachers than Iranian mothers.

4. Discussion

The key question pursued in this study was whether or not teachers should be informed of children in their class

born via egg donation from the perspective of Iranian and British mothers with children born by egg donation and naturally. The general consensus was more of disagreement to share this information with the teacher. Some of the main comments were that it is a private matter and something that is not relevant to the education of the child. However, what was of interest here was that the Iranian mothers with naturally born children were in comparison more keener that this information should be shared with the teachers compared to British mothers. The reason for this may be more rooted in the traditional religious country in which ART conceived children, particularly by egg donation, are still not so readily accepted (Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2008; Tremayne, 2012).Thus, the negative feelings that mothers with naturally born children may have about conception by egg donation may reflect itself in their tendency for the information to be shared by teachers.

There is, however, another side of this debate on whether teachers should have knowledge of which child was born as a result of egg donation. The current on-going research on psychological, medical and social consequences of ART born children (via IVF or egg donation) is still not conclusive. For example, research indicates that children born as a result of IVF may be more hyperactive (Beydoun et al., 2010), are more likely to be expelled from school (Zhan et al., 2013) may be more socially withdrawn (Wagenaar et al., 2009) and may have a lower IQ score (Zhan et al., 2013). There is in comparison less research on consequences of egg donation mainly in view of the reluctance of parents to take part (see e.g. Golombok et al., 2013). The overall consensus is that the general public is less knowledgeable or feel less positive about egg donation compared to other forms of ART conception (see Hudson et al, 2009). This issue brings to mind the famously known "Pygmalion in the classroom" (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). The study came to the conclusion that teachers may behave differently towards pupils who they believe to be low achievers. Thus, the question here is whether teachers may have the same attitude towards children born by egg donation. Indeed, if in a society (such as Iran) there is not a very positive attitude towards children born as a result of egg donation, or the scientific research regarding the consequences of such conception is not conclusive, this may affect those involved in the education of the children. Thus, whether teachers should be given information about which children's conception is via egg donation should be subject to more research and scrutiny by all parties involved.

Future research should focus on the actual teacher's attitudes about children born as a result of egg donation. This is because their positive or negative attitudes may affect the way they interact with the children in their classroom.

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