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Young women's knowledge and attitudes regarding egg harvesting and its Risks

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Abstract

Egg harvesting is a medical procedure that has been used since the late 1970s in infertility clinics worldwide. The number of egg harvesting procedures has risen steeply in the last decade due to increased prevalence of in vitro fertilization (IVF) with so-called "donor eggs" rather than the birth mother's own eggs, as well as to growing demand for human eggs from scientists investigating stem cells. Within the last two or three years, infertility specialists have also begun promoting egg harvesting and freezing as an ostensible means for otherwise healthy young women to ensure their future ability to have children. Short-term risks of the type of egg harvesting that is accompanied by hormone treatment are well known. Yet despite the fact that hundreds of thousands of women have undergone egg harvesting, few long-term studies of potential risks have been done, and those have yielded contradictory results (e.g., Ness, 2002, Althius, et al., 2005; Brinton, et al., 2005). The practice of soliciting young women's participation in what has become a global market for eggs thus raises critical ethical issues concerning informed consent (Beeson and Lippmann, 2006). This study will survey young women's knowledge and attitudes toward egg harvesting and its risks. Such information will yield critical insights into how best to frame health information intended to enable women to make informed choices about this procedure.

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