

Family bonds: How does surrogacy impact on relationships?

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Family outing. Credit: photo_gratis, Flickr Creative Commons

Preliminary results from a pioneering study at Cambridge University paint a positive picture of the relationships formed between surrogates and the families they help to create.

When a woman becomes a surrogate to enable others to have a baby, new relationships are formed. Research carried out by the Centre of Family Research, University of Cambridge, suggests that many of these relationships flourish. The research will be presented today at the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE) conference in London.

Surrogacy, the process whereby a woman carries and gives birth to a baby for an infertile couple, has become a more widely-accepted way of building a family, helped in part by [media coverage](#) of its use by high-profile celebrities. Commercially arranged surrogacy is illegal in the UK and many surrogates, most of whom have children of their own, are motivated by the desire to help others have a family.

To date there has been limited research into the long-term impact of surrogacy on the adults and children involved in the process, but now a study at the Centre for Family Research is looking at whether, and how, surrogacy affects family relationships.

Today Dr Vasanti Jadva and PhD candidate Susan Imrie of the Centre for Family Research will present findings from a two-year ESRC-funded research project which looks at the experiences of surrogacy from a range of perspectives including that of the partners and children of surrogates as well as surrogates themselves.

The research is based on in-depth interviews with 34 surrogates, 36 children of surrogates and 11 partners of surrogates. Twenty of the surrogates had been interviewed by Dr Jadva more than ten years ago in a previous project which looked at the psychological wellbeing and experiences of surrogates one year after the birth of the surrogacy child. The participation of these women allowed the researchers to track relationships over time, adding a valuable dimension to the study.

The findings [paint](#) a largely positive picture of the relationships between the surrogate and her own family, and between these individuals and the families created through surrogacy.

"Our research shows that in the majority of cases, relationships formed as a result of surrogacy are valued and enjoyed by surrogates and sustained over time," said Dr Jadva. The study found that surrogates

stayed in touch with the majority of the surrogacy children (77 per cent) and with most of the parents (85 per cent of mothers, 76 per cent of fathers). Of the surrogates who had chosen to maintain contact with the surrogacy families, most would meet in person once or twice a year.

Most of the surrogates' own children (86 per cent) had a positive view of their mothers' involvement in surrogacy. Almost half (47 per cent) were in contact with the surrogacy child all of whom reported a good relationship with him or her. A significant number of surrogates' children referred to the child as a sibling or a half sibling.

There are two types of surrogacy practised in the UK: gestational surrogacy, also known as host surrogacy, in which the surrogate gestates the couple's embryo (or an embryo created using a donor egg) and becomes pregnant through IVF; and genetic surrogacy, also known as traditional surrogacy, in which the surrogate uses her own egg and is thus the genetic mother of the child.

Interestingly, the type of surrogacy did not affect how the surrogacy child was viewed by the [surrogates](#)' own children and did not appear to have a bearing on whether the experience was seen as positive or negative by those involved.

Susan Imrie said: "It is clear that the children of surrogate mothers do not experience any negative consequences as a result of their mother's decision to be a surrogate and that this was irrespective of whether or not the surrogate used her own egg. In fact, most of the children we spoke to were supportive of their mother being a surrogate and were proud of what she'd achieved."

Surrogacy offers a means of having [children](#) to a growing number of couples experiencing fertility problems or unable to conceive. The practice is legal in the UK on an altruistic and non-commercial basis, and

surrogacy arrangements are non-enforceable in law. The surrogate is the legal mother of the child until legal parentage is transferred to the intended parents through a Parental Order which can be applied for between six weeks and six months after the birth. Since 2010 it has been possible for same-sex couples in the UK to use surrogacy as a means of parenthood. Although no accurate figures are available on the number of surrogacies carried out in the UK, it is estimated that numbers are increasing.

Dr Vasanti Jadva will be presenting her paper 'Children of surrogate mothers: psychological wellbeing, [family relationships](#) and experiences of surrogacy' at the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE) on Monday, 8 July. Susan Imrie's poster is titled 'Surrogate mothers: contact and relationships with families created through surrogacy'.

Provided by University of Cambridge

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