

Couples needing sperm donation favor the same donor for all conceptions

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Despite a prevalence of anonymous sperm donation in European countries, the use of the same sperm donor for subsequent conceptions is of paramount importance to those couples needing sperm donation to have children. "We found a marked tendency to favour full genetic bonds where possible," said midwife Sara Somers presenting study results today at the Annual Meeting of ESHRE.

The study, performed by Ms Somers and colleagues at the Ghent University Hospital and Ghent University in Belgium, included 34 lesbian and heterosexual couples using [sperm](#) donation to start or extend their families who were interviewed about their treatment between 2012 and 2013. Nineteen of the couples had already had a child conceived by [sperm donation](#), 15 were in treatment at the time of the study.

The couples were from three types of family: with siblings from the same [sperm donor](#), siblings from a different donor, and siblings with a different biological mother (in lesbian couples). Yet overall they showed a clear preference for the same donor for their [children](#). In describing the reasons for this preference, they noted that the genetic link between children encouraged better sibling relations, and that visible and other resemblances between the children would underline the family ties. Indeed, said Ms Somers, uncertainty about the availability of the same donor over time was evident in several of the interviews.

The investigators acknowledged the paradox of their findings - that, while sperm (and egg) donation necessarily imply the genetic

detachment of the child from one of its parents, couples themselves seem determined to do as much as possible to ensure genetic bonds between their children.

"Donor offspring are increasingly seeking their genetic half siblings through online registries," said Ms Somers. "It's relatively uncharted territory, but it's clear that a genetic link among donor-conceived children is important for aspiring parents." According to findings from this study, full siblings were described by the parents as having "real" and "unambiguous" kin connections.

Some [couples](#) talked about their need to use a new sperm donor if the one they had used for their first child was no longer available. This was described for instance as "a problem". When this situation became reality for one couple, they were really "disappointed" and blamed the hospital for "making the mistake of not informing them about the limited 'stock' of sperm". Others, however, were more accommodating about not being able to use [donor sperm](#) from the same donor for subsequent children. They adopted a more passive account and focused on the social link between the children: "If we are out of vials, you just choose another donor, right?"; "If the children do not have the same dad, they will still have the same family." However, said Ms Somers, even for these patients it was not their first choice to use the sperm of different donors, but they opted for a new donor instead of not being treated.

"Nevertheless," she added, "in almost one third of the [lesbian couples](#) in our study both partners had carried a child or were willing to carry a child. For them, the genetic link between mother and child was chosen over a full genetic link between the siblings. In this case, the children can only be genetically related via the donor."

The findings, said Ms Somers, also have implications for [sperm banks](#) and clinics, not only in the counselling of their patients about [genetic](#)

[links](#), but also in the identification, storage and availability of their sperm stocks.

More information: Abstract O-138, Tuesday 16 June , Using the same sperm donor for siblings: What it means to parents

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