

Prenatal screening for Down's syndrome seen as 'routine practice'

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Credit: Cardiff University

Optional prenatal screening for Down's syndrome has become a 'normal' part of pregnancy, with consequences for women and their partners, according to new research by Cardiff University.

In a study of [healthcare professionals](#) involved in Down's syndrome screening in the UK, Dr Gareth Thomas of the University's School of Social Sciences shows how screening for the condition has become an expected pit-stop on the pregnancy journey.

'Meet the baby'

Through the language used by both professionals and expectant parents during consultations, to the exclusive framing of ultrasound scans as a means to 'meet the baby', and subtle but clear messages that produce a negative portrayal of disability, the opt-in procedure has become routine.

Dr Thomas said: "In the UK and beyond, Down's syndrome screening has become a universal programme in prenatal care, but technologies have successfully become normalised as 'a thing that you should do'. This can lead, for example, to pregnant women – and possibly their partners – consenting to medical procedures without full knowledge of what results may follow and what tough decisions will subsequently have to be made about their pregnancy.

"This research shows how there are many issues and concerns with the way that Down's syndrome [screening](#) currently happens. It is carried out in spite of reports about pregnant women's ambivalent and problematic experiences with it, and despite opposition to it from both scholars and activist groups in different countries..."

"While this has been heralded as a form of scientific innovation and a sign of progress for ensuring informed choice among [pregnant women](#), it has also been criticised by disability rights organisations for supposedly promising a form of eugenics and the negative valuation of the lives of children with a disability.

"It is really important that we pay attention to such developments and think through all of the social and ethical issues that will emerge with respect to NIPT. I believe that the issues addressed by this research provide a strong starting point for this discussion."

The research is detailed in Dr Thomas' new book *Down's Syndrome*

Screening and Reproductive Politics, which is available now.

Provided by Cardiff University

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