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MOTIVATIONS OF SPERM DONORS

Ariella Farzan Nikou, BS¹, Joanne Won, BS², Hyewon Choi, MS¹, Stephanie Pan, MS¹, Joseph A. Lee, BA², Christopher Antonelli, BS³, Natan Bar-Chama, MD², Jaime M. Shamonki, MD³ and Alan B Copperman, MD¹

1. Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Science, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, Klingenstein Pavilion 1176 Fifth Avenue 9th Floor New York, New York, United States, 10029.
2. Reproductive Medicine Associates of New York, 635 Madison Ave 10th Floor New York, New York, United States, 10022
3. Generate Life Sciences, Los Angeles, CA

OBJECTIVE:

The limited knowledge base on sperm donors' motivations includes mostly international studies with small sample sizes [1-6]. In the decades since its inception, sperm donation has shifted from an anonymous physician-led process for infertile heterosexual couples to a holistic process led by the prospective parents, including single mothers by choice and the LGBTQ community, who often request a better understanding of a sperm donor's motivations [7]. The objective of this study was to investigate the association between sperm donor motivations and demographic factors such as age, decade of birth, and highest level of education.

DESIGN:

Multi-center, retrospective cohort study

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

The motivations of U.S. sperm donors aged 18-39, from 2008-2010 and 2016-2018, were coded according to the following four categories: financial, desire to pass on genes, general altruism, and personal altruism (i.e. a personal experience inspired the donor). Primary, secondary, and tertiary motivations were included when multiple reasons were cited. Donors were excluded if their motivation did not fit within one of the four categories. Data on age, decade of birth (1970's, 1980's, and 1990's), and highest level of education (Undergraduate/Associate's, Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate degrees) at the time of donation was also collected. Continuous



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and categorical measures were compared using a Kruskal-Wallis test and Fisher's exact test, respectively.

RESULTS:

A total of 586 sperm donors aged 26.90 ± 4.54 participated in this study. The most commonly cited motivations were financial and general altruism. 65.02% (n= 381) of donors cited financial as their primary, secondary or tertiary reason, while 27.65% (n=162) of donors selected general or personal altruism as their primary reason with no other reason. Age was significantly associated with primary motivation with a median age of 26 for financial, general and personal altruism, while 30 was the median age for the desire to pass on genes ($p=0.0002$). Financial and general altruism were the most cited motivations for every decade of birth; general altruism decreased in frequency and financial increased in frequency with every decade ($p=0.0026$). The highest level of education was not significantly associated with the primary motivation among all ages ($p=0.017$).

CONCLUSIONS:

This robust study of sperm donors demonstrated that financial and general altruism were the most commonly cited motivations, though financial was a prominent motivating force for approximately 2/3rd of donors (65.02%), whereas altruism was the only motivating force for less than 1/3rd (27.65%) of donors. We also noted a generational gap, wherein older generations appeared more altruistic as compared to younger generations. Additionally, donors who expressed a primary desire to pass on genes were significantly older (30.00 (26.00,34.00); $p=0.0002$). In conclusion, our study is part of ongoing longitudinal research into the sociology surrounding sperm donation — research that is crucial as modern families become more common and donor-conceived offspring come of age.

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