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## COMMENTARY

# Using an introduction website to start a family: implications for users and health practitioners

Joyce Harper<sup>a,\*</sup>, Emily Jackson<sup>b</sup>, Laura Spoelstra-Witjens<sup>c</sup>, Dan Reisel<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Embryology, IVF and Reproductive Genetics Group, Institute for Women's Health, University College London; <sup>b</sup> Law Department, London School of Economics and Political Science; <sup>c</sup> formerly of the National Gamete Donation Trust and National Sperm Bank; <sup>d</sup> Centre for Ethics in Women's Health, Institute for Women's Health, University College London

\* Corresponding author. E-mail address: [joyce.harper@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:joyce.harper@ucl.ac.uk) (J. Harper).

**Abstract** Donor insemination treatment offered in licensed clinics protects the donor, recipient and offspring both medically and legally. The Internet has opened up novel, unregulated ways of donating sperm through 'introduction websites' and social media forums. Broadly, three categories of women use introduction websites: those who want to have a child with no further involvement of the donor; those who wish to know the identity of the donor from the start; and those who intend to electively co-parent, that is, to bring up the child together with the donor/father. Donors may choose to donate through introduction websites for altruistic reasons and/or in order to have greater involvement with the child. There are some donors who are motivated by the prospect of a sexual encounter, advertising their preference for 'natural insemination' – i.e. via sexual intercourse or partial intercourse. When people make their own arrangements online, they may do so in the absence of clear, accurate information. This article, sets out some of the issues that recipients and donors ought to consider before embarking on unregulated sperm donation.

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## Introduction

The digital era has opened up new ways of obtaining donor sperm. It is easy and comparatively cheap to access sperm online, for example, from one of the many sperm banks that will ship sperm worldwide for home insemination. Additionally, a growing number of introduction websites offer women and couples the opportunity to meet a potential sperm donor online (Table 1). It is also increasingly common for donors and recipients to find each other on social media, and particularly on Facebook (Harley, 2016). This paper concentrates on introduction websites, which broadly leads to three categories of parenting involvement. First, those who want to have a child with no further involvement of the donor; second, those who wish to know the identity of

the donor from the start; and third, those who intend to electively co-parent, that is, to bring up the child together with the donor/father. Introduction websites are legal but unregulated, making it difficult to assess the scope and prevalence of the practice. Unlike donors and patients in licensed clinics, participants in these arrangements may not be made aware of the medical and legal implications of donor conception. This paper sets out some of the issues that recipients and donors should consider before embarking on unregulated sperm donation.

## Elective co-parenting

Elective co-parenting is where a male and female who are not in a sexual relationship decide to have a child together, with

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**Table 1** Selection of online sperm donation sites found when searching in the UK.

Organisation / Website	Link	Where based	Costs for registration / matching	Size of membership – not verified
CoParents.co.uk	<a href="https://www.coparents.co.uk/">https://www.coparents.co.uk/</a>	Worldwide offices and originally started as CoParents.com	Free to join, list a profile and search for a match, then £6.60/month to message. All active members pay a fee to eradicate time wasters. You can block members.	Over 15,000 UK members, 30% going into co-parenting arrangements.
Co-Parents UK Facebook group	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Coparentscouk">https://www.facebook.com/Coparentscouk</a>	UK	Free access group	1103 followers
Co-parent Match Facebook group	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Co-ParentMatch-130819890331066/">https://www.facebook.com/Co-ParentMatch-130819890331066/</a>	Worldwide	Free access group	944 followers
Pollen Tree	<a href="http://www.pollentree.com/coparenting">http://www.pollentree.com/coparenting</a>	UK	Registration is free, but then you are asked to subscribe. No costs available.	Branded as a worldwide community. In a Guardian interview, the founder claimed to have 8500 subscribed users.
Modamily	<a href="http://modamily.com/">http://modamily.com/</a>	USA	Free to join and build a profile, subscription required to access other services. 3 months personal concierge package - \$99.99/month 6 months package - \$24.99/month	5000 subscribers, 900 of which are British.
Pride Angel	<a href="http://www.prideangel.com/">http://www.prideangel.com/</a>	UK	They do not allow any members offering natural insemination or asking for money and you can report abusers. You buy credits – starting at £20 – to message others. These do not run out so you are not limited to a specific time period.	Over 18,000 members worldwide, numbers wishing to co-parent in the UK: 840 women, 529 men.
Family by Design	<a href="http://www.familybydesign.com/">http://www.familybydesign.com/</a>	USA	Free to register, but matching and messaging can only be accessed by subscribers, no costs shown	Not known
Co-Parents UK!!! Facebook group	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/COPUK/">https://www.facebook.com/groups/COPUK/</a>	UK	Closed access support group	260 members
Known Donor Registry	<a href="https://knowndonorregistry.com/">https://knowndonorregistry.com/</a>	USA	Completely free, the site runs on donations	Not known
My Alternative Family Facebook group (main website not working)	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/mafsite/">https://www.facebook.com/mafsite/</a>	USA	Open access group; (irregular postings)	392 likes
Sperm Donation UK	<a href="http://spermdonationuk.co.uk/">http://spermdonationuk.co.uk/</a>	UK	Free to access, but redirects you to CoParentMatch UK to chat further	Not known
Feeling Broody / Donorcoparent.com	<a href="http://feelingbroody.com/">http://feelingbroody.com/</a>	UK	£12 membership fee per year	Not known

the aim of bringing the child up in separate households, but with the involvement of both genetic parents (Erera and Segal-Engelchin, 2014; Herbrand, 2008; Jadva et al., 2015; Segal-Engelchin et al., 2012; Smietana et al., 2014). Elective co-parenting is not new (Patterson, 1992). Anecdotally, it is not uncommon for lesbian couples to ask a male friend to donate his sperm so that they can have a child, with whom the

genetic father may have an ongoing relationship. Conversely, a gay man may form a non-sexual relationship with a single woman or lesbian couple in order to conceive and co-parent a child.

Prospective parents may choose to bring a known donor to a clinic for this purpose, but most clinics that offer donor insemination use sperm from banks, where the sperm donor

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