

The opinion of Iranian students about the society's perception on using surrogacy as an infertility treatment in the future community



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ABSTRACT

Background: Surrogacy is one of the challengeable treatments for infertility; therefore, it seems necessary to learn the attitude of people toward it, especially the opinion of those who are working in infertility treatment. Students studying midwifery, medicine, psychology and law are involved in this process to various degrees. The aim of this study was to investigate the students' opinions about the perception of the society on using surrogacy.

Materials and methods: This study was a descriptive cross-sectional survey. The sample of this study included 200 students of the Isfahan University and Isfahan University of Medical Sciences from the following courses: Midwifery, Medicine, Psychology and Law. Since the number of students in different discipline was not equal, we therefore used quota sampling. The data collection instrument was a researcher-made questionnaire. The questionnaire included questions on their knowledge, attitude and surrogacy acceptance in the future in Iran.

Results: The students of the medical course were mostly in the category "strongly agree" and "agree" with surrogacy (43 students which constitute 79.6%), then, midwifery students (15 students which constitute 78.9%) and finally, the students of other courses agreed less with this method.

According to chi-square test, there was no significant difference between attitudes of students ($P=0.08$). Individuals mostly assert their acceptance of this method through "increasing tendency to this method in the future" (77.1%).

Conclusion: Students in this study had a positive attitude toward surrogacy and they accepted it as a norm; despite this, it is essential to make some changes within cultures to improve the situation.

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Introduction

In developing technologies in medical science there are chances for selection of this type of treatment.

One of the new advances in medical sciences includes modern treatments for fertility [1,2]. Surrogacy or contract motherhood can be considered as one of the modern infertility treatments [3]. In this method, a woman agrees to become pregnant and deliver a child for other couples [4]. Use of surrogacy is a method for women who cannot become pregnant due to medical reasons, especially when the womb cannot carry the pregnancy. Such treatment helps them to have their own biological children [5–8]. After some decades of using surrogacy in the United States of America from 1977 [9], it is about to start to attract the attention of infertile couples in other societies and Iran's society [6]. Surrogacy is forbidden in Sunni

religion, however, the laws of Shia religion on this issue are different and the dominant religion in Iran is Shia. Although many clerics in Iran don't permit use of surrogacy as a fertility treatment, some of Iran's jurist and Islamic clerics believe it does not contradict with our beliefs and it is permissible [10]. Therefore, many years ago, the law and the current spiritual leader of Iran permitted the use of surrogacy, donor eggs and even donor sperm; however, there isn't a modern law [11]. The Iranian legislation is about embryo donation to infertile couples; however, it forgets to explain how to use surrogacy [12].

Although infertility care is one of the tasks that are defined by reproductive health experts [13], there is no generalized tendency toward surrogacy. Although social attitudes toward this phenomenon have changed, it is not acceptable for Iranian people that a mother leaves her newborn to other couples [14]. Such topics have caused many ethical challenges, people's concerns [4] and continual discussions among the Iranian experts of these fields [3,15]. On the other hand, Iran is passing a historical transformation from tradition to modernity. Indeed synchronization of traditional

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phenomena and modern methods of treatment, such as surrogacy, have caused complications and specific difficulties in applying this method. Therefore, we need to do more studies on infertility treatment through surrogacy in order to discover more aspects of the issues related to surrogacy [16]. There are few studies on the experts' attitude toward the new treatment technologies [15], and there are some studies investigating the views of a special group of people [17] and infertile women [18]. Given that the views of related individuals are also very important, this question is one of the major unanswered questions in this field and also whether this method is acceptable for related occupations or not. Therefore, we studied the views of last semester students in midwifery, medicine, psychology and law toward acceptability in society and the future of surrogacy.

Materials and methods

This study was a descriptive cross-sectional survey carried out amongst students of third and fourth years studying medicine, midwifery, psychology and law at Isfahan University of Medical Sciences and Isfahan University. Isfahan University and Isfahan University of Medical Sciences are public universities with students from all over Iran. The numbers of students in different disciplines were not equal, therefore, we used quota sampling. According to similar studies [19], our sample size included 200 students from the whole population that included 520 students. We specified the ratio of samples in each discipline: 23 students from the midwifery course (of total 60 students), 60 students from medicine (of total 154), 46 students from law (of total 120) and 71 students from psychology (of total 186) being selected through simple sampling. The inclusion criteria were individuals from Iranian nationality and willing to participate in the study. Those who didn't answer two main sections of the questionnaire and those who scored less than 3 on knowledge were excluded from the study (the maximum score was 7).

Data collection was done through a researcher-made questionnaire. Except for one question in part three of the questionnaire for the general opinion about surrogacy which was extracted from a Japanese questionnaire, other questions were constructed through answers to open questions in a pilot study. The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by experts of law, midwifery, obstetrics and psychology; and the reliability of this questionnaire was obtained as 82% through internal constant of alpha Cronbach for questions in the third part of questionnaire. The questionnaire included three sections: (1) Demography (four questions), (2) knowledge (seven questions) and (3) view about surrogacy in future (one question for

general view toward surrogacy and nine questions for its acceptability and usability of surrogacy in the future). In questions related to knowledge, a score for each answer was within a scale ranging from zero to one. If the total score was less than three, awareness was low, and if it was more than five, awareness was good. In questions related to attitude about surrogacy, the answers were graded by means of a 0–4 (4: strongly agree, 3: agree, 2: Conservativenot agree or disagree, 1: disagree, 0: strongly disagree). For data analysis, we noticed the direction of question, then for some questions that “strongly agree” was as a negative view, the score was zero and for strongly disagree, the score was four. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics tests chi-square using SPSS 16.

Results

It should be noted than 10 students didn't accept to respond to questionnaire. Moreover, the mean score of individuals on knowledge section was 30. Those individuals with low awareness were excluded from the study. From the whole sample, 23 subjects were male (13.5%) and 147 subjects were female (86.5%).

In sum, 88.2% (150) of the individuals were single and 11.8% were married. Most students were from the central parts of Iran (73%) and were Persian.

In the section “general view about surrogacy”, the response rate was 93% (158 students). Most of the students agreed with using surrogacy, the number of students in law was 31 (91.1%), psychology 62 (98.4%), medicine 49 (90.7%), midwifery 16 (84.2%) and medicine 43 (79.6%).

Based on the chi-square test, the results showed there is no significant difference between students concerning general view ($\chi^2 = 11.16, P = 0.08$). Fig. 1 presents the distribution of students' opinions toward acceptance and the feasibility for surrogacy in future.

In this study, most students (77.1%) believed in “increasing tendency to this method in the future”. The most students selected the options “strongly agree” and “agree” for these statements: “gradually will be acceptable to the public” (68.2%), “it is useful to strengthen families and prevent divorce.” (61.7%) and “state laws should not inhibit this method” (56.5%). Nobody agreed with this statement “this method is better than adoption for infertile couples” (Table 1).

Discussion

With respect to the surrogacy, individuals in the society have one of three roles: Volunteer to be a surrogate mother, infertile

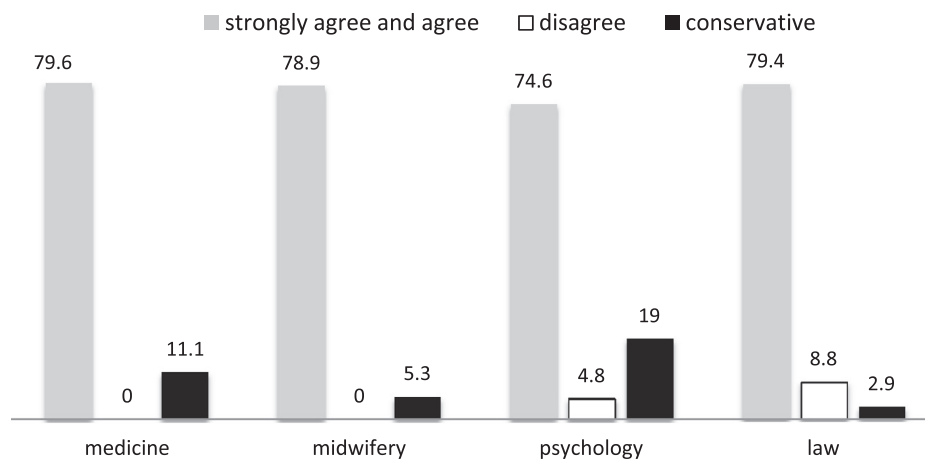


Fig. 1. Percentage of students' general perceptions toward surrogacy between different disciplines*. *p = 0.08, $\chi^2 = 11.16$.

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