

Danish sperm donors across three decades: motivations and attitudes

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Objective: To study the motivation and attitudes toward donor anonymity, economic compensation, and insemination of lesbian and single women among Danish sperm donors in 2012 compared with the two preceding decades.

Design: Anonymous survey.

Setting: Danish sperm bank.

Patient(s): Sperm donors active in 2012 (n = 97), 2002 (n = 62), and 1992 (n = 41).

Intervention(s): All donors who donated sperm in the study period were asked to participate. The results were compared with those of previous surveys from the same sperm bank.

Main Outcome Measure(s): Motivation and attitudes toward donor anonymity, economic compensation, and insemination of lesbian and single women.

Result(s): In 2012, the most frequently stated factor was altruism, motivating 90% of the sperm donors, which was not significantly different from the previous surveys. If economic compensations were removed, only 14% would continue to donate. The proportion of anonymous donors who would stop their donations if anonymity was abolished was 51%, 56%, and 67% in 1992, 2002, and 2012, respectively. A significantly increasing proportion of donors felt positive about donation to lesbian couples.

Conclusion(s): The motivation for sperm donation is multifaceted and primarily based on economic compensation and altruism. Most Danish donors would stop their donations if economic compensation or anonymity were abolished. (Fertil Steril® 2014;101:252–7. ©2014 by American Society for Reproductive Medicine.)

Key Words: Tissue donors, semen, demography, motivation, attitude

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The demographic composition, motivation, and attitudes of sperm donors are of great importance not only for patients and law-makers but also for clinicians and researchers. Especially issues concerning donor anonymity, economical compensation, number of offspring per donor, and insemination of lesbian and single women are continuously raising debate, and legislation varies greatly between countries. The United King-

dom, Norway, Sweden, Finland, The Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Australia, and New Zealand are countries where only identifiable donors are allowed (1). In general, The United States is considered to be a liberal country, allowing the use of sperm from both anonymous and nonanonymous donors and insemination of lesbian and single women (2). Similarly, in 2007 it was made legal for doctors in Denmark to inseminate lesbian and

single women with donor sperm (3), and in the autumn of 2012 a revision of the Danish law on fertility treatments allowed the use of both anonymous and nonanonymous donation (4), making Denmark one of the least restrictive nations regarding sperm donations. Regarding economic compensation, Canada has prohibited any type of donor compensation apart from actual expenditures (5). In general, such legislation may have an impact on the number of available donors and consequently on the availability of treatments for women or couples seeking insemination with donor sperm.

We aimed to investigate the motivation and attitudes toward these issues among active Danish sperm donors in a large sperm bank. We also aimed to describe the development in motivations and attitudes toward donation

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over time by repeating a survey conducted at the same sperm bank in 1992 and 2002 (6). This is the first study to investigate the demographic composition, motivations, and attitudes regarding sperm donation among sperm donors over a period of three decades.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Population

This survey was conducted at the sperm bank Cryos International-Denmark, which has four departments in Denmark (Copenhagen, Aarhus, Aalborg, and Odense). The sperm bank is the largest in the world with supply to more than 70 countries worldwide and a selection of sperm from ~500 donors, of whom ~100 actively donate on a regular basis.

At the start of donation, the donors choose to be either anonymous, where the identity is forever confidential, or non-anonymous, where a child can have the identity of the donor revealed when he or she is 18 years old. At Cryos International-Denmark, the possibility of being nonanonymous is primarily restricted to donors >25 years old unless a doctor approves the choice of nonanonymity. In addition, the donor chooses to have either a basic profile (ethnicity, hair and eye color, height and stoutness) or an extended donor profile (basic information as well as additional information such as personal traits, interests, etc.). The donors are compensated with an amount of money for their inconvenience and expenses depending on quality and volume as well as type of donor. This amount can be up to a maximum of 65 Euros per donation according to a limit set by the Danish authorities.

Data Collection

At each department, all donors who came for donation from April 1 to December 31, 2012 (9 months) were asked to participate in the survey. They could fill in the questionnaire on site or at home. Reminders were sent to donors who did not fill in the questionnaire on site or failed to return it from home within 2 weeks.

The donor questionnaire was partly based on previous surveys conducted at the same sperm bank in 1992 and 2002, which investigated the motivations and attitudes among donors active at that time (6). In 1992 ($n = 41$), all donors were included in the study whereas in 2002 both active approved donors ($n = 62$) and donor candidates (not yet approved as a donor; $n = 31$) were included in the repeated survey. Because the supply of donors was high, the sperm bank did not have a need for new donors in 2012, and only approved donors were included. Therefore, when comparing the motivation and attitudes of donors we included only approved donors from 2002 and 2012, although a small proportion of the donors from 1992 may have answered the questionnaire before approval, because there was no distinction between these donor types in the 1992 survey.

Compared with the previous surveys, supplemental questions were added to make the survey contemporary and to put further focus on certain aspects of donation. Except for two questions, all questions were given with options. The questionnaire was anonymous and contained 30 questions in

five domains: basic information, motivations for donation, attitudes and feelings about the children, attitudes toward donations to single or lesbian women, and psychologic factors related to donation. Information on the participating donors' demographic backgrounds was retrieved from the sperm bank's internal registry.

Statistical Analysis

At the end of the inclusion period, all answered questionnaires were typed into Epidata software (7) and exported to Stata 12 (8) for statistical analyses. All answers are reported with means and standard deviations for continuous variables and with absolute numbers and percentages for categorical variables. When comparing the results with the two previous surveys, we used one-way analysis of variance for continuous variables and Fisher exact test for categorical variables. P values < .05 were considered to be statistically significant.

Ethical Approval

Surveys do not require approval from an Ethical Committee in Denmark. The study was reported to and approved by the Danish Data Protection Agency (file no. 2012-41-0241).

RESULTS

A total of 105 active donors who came for donations during the inclusion period were asked to participate, and 97 completed the questionnaire (response rate 92%). No donors had been active long enough to have participated in either of the previous surveys from 1992 and 2002.

Demographic characteristics of the donor population are presented in Table 1. In 2012, the mean age of the donors was 29.1 years (± 6.5). This was 1.2 years higher than in 2002 (95% confidence interval [CI] 0.1–2.5 y; $P = .08$) and 4.9 years higher than in 1992 (95% CI 3.6–6.2 y; $P < .001$). There was a significant trend of increasing age across the three surveys ($P < .001$). There was no significant difference in partner status, but a higher proportion of the donors participating in the 2012 survey had children of their own ($P = .008$). The occupational status was significantly different, with a lower proportion of students among the 2012 donors compared with the donors from 1992 and 2002.

In 2012, donors were 70% anonymous and 30% nonanonymous. The age of the nonanonymous donors (32.7 ± 7.6 y) was significantly higher than that of the anonymous donors (27.5 ± 5.2 y; $P < .001$). There were no differences in the proportion of donors with a partner or children or in the occupation status between anonymous and nonanonymous donors. In 2012 a total of 34% of the donors had chosen to have a basic profile and 66% an extended profile. There were no associations between type of profile and age, partner status, children, or occupational status. The mean number of donations was 77 ± 63 in 2012. The average compensation for a donation was 33 Euros (± 12), based on information from an internal registry at the sperm bank. The proportion of donors that also performed blood donations was 46%.

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