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# Children born through gamete donation and surrogacy

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# Gamete donation & Surrogacy in the UK



## Gamete donation

- Donor anonymity removed in 2005 – all clinic donors are now Identity release

## Surrogacy

- Surrogate may receive ‘reasonable expenses’; surrogacy arrangements are non-enforceable
- Two types of surrogacy
  - Gestational/ Host
  - Traditional/Genetic/Straight



# Longitudinal study of ART families



- Included egg donation, sperm donation and surrogacy families
- Focus on
  - Psychological wellbeing of parents
  - Quality of parenting
  - Child development
  - Parent-child relationship



# Longitudinal study of ART families



- Gamete donation and non-ART families recruited through hospitals and clinics in UK (pre removal of donor anonymity).
- Surrogacy families recruited through Office for National Statistics and Childlessness Through Surrogacy (COTS).
- All DI families had used an anonymous donor.
- Most egg donation families had used an anonymous donor. Some had used a known donor who was either a family member or friend.

# Sample



	Age 1	Age 2	Age 3	Age 7	Age 10	Age 14
Egg donation	51	48	41	32	30	27
Sperm donation	50	46	41	35	34	32
Surrogacy	42	37	34	32	30	28
Non-ART	80	68	67	54	56	54

# Method



Participants visited at home

In-depth semi-structured interviews (coded using a standardized coding scheme) e.g.

- expressed warmth
- emotional over-involvement
- sensitive responding

Questionnaires assessing psychological health of parents and child:

- Depression
- Marital state
- Parenting stress
- Child adjustment

# Methods at ages 7, 10, 14



Observational assessments of parent-child interaction

Children's interviews about their conception

Teacher scores on children's adjustment (SDQ)

## Findings at age 7 and 10



All children scored within the normal range for adjustment, as measured by the SDQ.

### At age 7

Children born through surrogacy scored higher than other children (but this did not represent clinical problems)

### Age 10

No differences

Similar findings have been found in studies of children adopted at birth. This could be because adopted children need to deal with issues of identity earlier than other children and the same could be true of surrogacy children.

## Findings at age 14



- Positive mother-adolescent relationships
- Scores for all families found high levels of maternal acceptance and family functioning.
  - The mean scores showed the donor insemination families were similar to the non-ART comparison group whereas the egg donation families showed less positive scores. (Reports by mothers and adolescents)
- Well-adjusted adolescents
  - No differences in emotional or behavioural problems or self-esteem

# Age 14: Telling the child



	Sperm donation	Egg donation	Surrogacy	Traditional surrogacy
<b>Told</b>	12 (38%)	17 (63%)	25 (86%)	15 (83%)
<b>Plans to tell</b>	3 (9%)	3 (11%)	3 (10%)	3 (17%)
<b>Plans not to tell</b>	15 (47%)	3 (11%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
<b>Uncertain</b>	2 (6%)	3 (11%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>Total</b>	32	27	29	18

# Age of disclosure



- Adolescents who were unaware of their conception did not differ from those who were aware of their conception or from non-ART adolescents.
- More positive family relationships and higher levels of psychological well-being were found for adolescents who had been told before age 7.
  - More positive parenting (warmth and sensitivity)
  - Less negative parenting (conflict)
  - Higher levels of global functioning (rated by mothers and children)
- No differences in psychological problems (SDQ) but those told earlier had more positive perceptions of family relationships which was associated with higher wellbeing ((EPOCH) Engagement, Perseverance, Optimism, Connectedness, and Happiness))

## Earlier findings: Child's perspective



- Children born using gamete donation understood very little about their conception at age 7 years despite having been told from age 4 years.

Blake et al. (2010)
- Children aged 10 showed better understanding of their donor conception and felt positive or neutral about it. Few children discussed their conception with their friends or family.

Blake et al. (2013)
- At age 10 years, most children felt neutral/indifferent about being born through surrogacy. Most who were in contact with their surrogate said they liked her. Those born using genetic surrogacy, being carried by another women explained first and use of the surrogates egg was explained at a later age.

Jadva V, et al. (2012)

# On-line connection sites



- Increase in people using on-line connection sites
  - Why do they use them?
  - What is the impact on the resultant child?

# Survey of members of on-line connection site Pride Angel



- 429 women looking for a sperm donor completed the survey.
  - 66% (283) lesbian
  - 18% (77) heterosexual
  - 12% (52) as bisexual

Most (76%) had a partner (married/cohabiting/civil partnership or non-cohabiting relationship)

# Importance of meeting the donor



	How important is it for you to meet the donor?		How important is it for you that the child meets the donor?	
	n	%	n	%
Very important	152	35	44	10
Quite important	98	23	42	10
Neither important or unimportant	112	26	145	34
Not very important	27	6	32	8
Not important at all	36	8	151	35

# Intentions to tell child about donor conception/donor

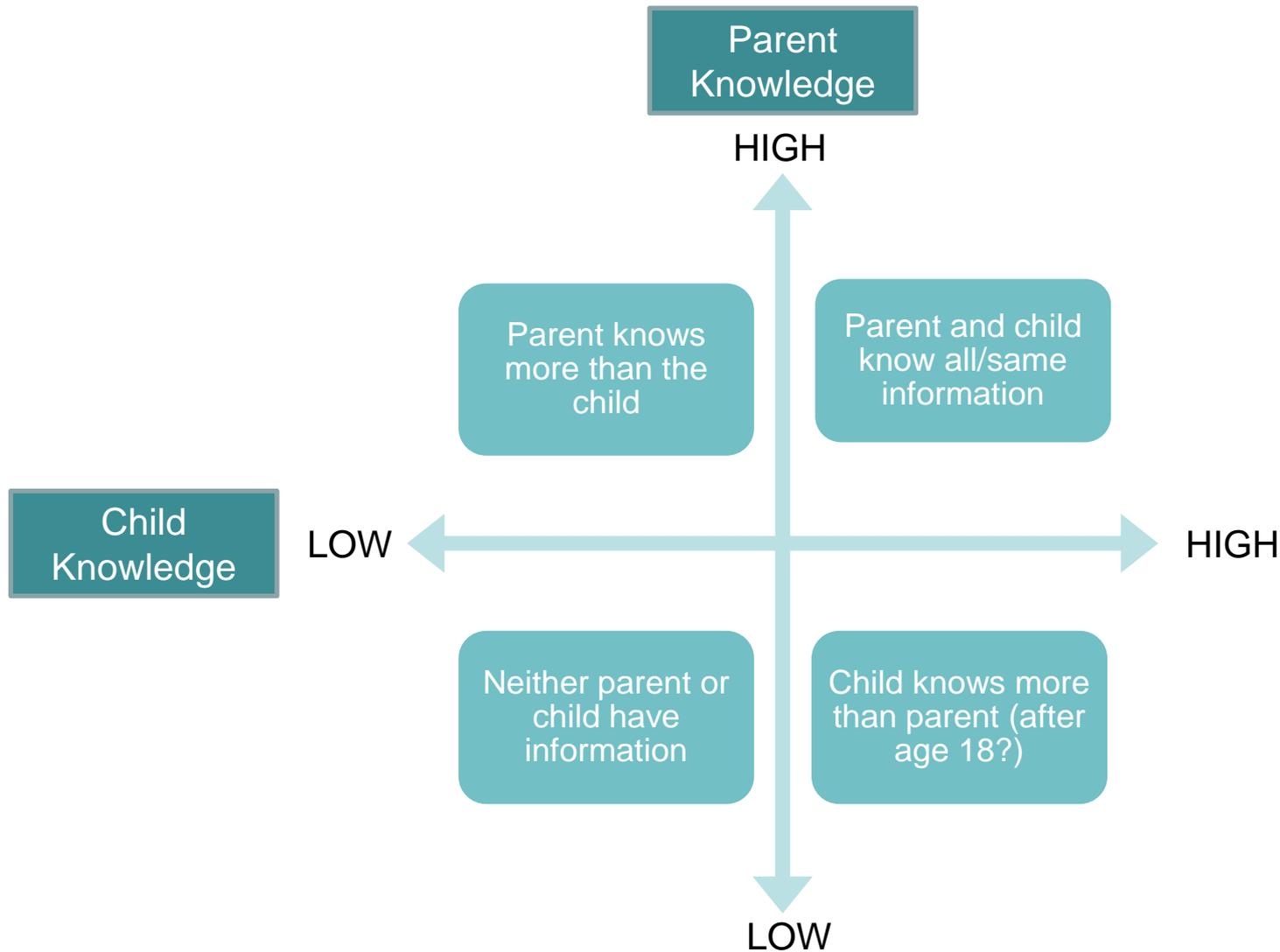


- 77% (332) were planning to tell their child about having used donated sperm,
- 18% (n = 79) were 'unsure' if they would tell
- 4% (n = 15) selected 'no'

In contrast, fewer participants were planning to tell their child about the donor's identity.

- 46% (197) selecting 'yes' they would tell the child,
- 15% (n = 62) selecting 'no'
- 38% (n = 164) selecting 'unsure'

# Donor information sharing between parent and child



# Conclusions



- Overall, families where parents lack a genetic or gestational connection to their parent have similar levels of well-being and parent-child relationships to other families.
- Children who learn of their conception before age 7 have better relationships with their parents.
- Parents and children can have different levels of information about the donor. Just because the parent knows the donor, doesn't mean the child will.



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