

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Egg freezing for 'social' reasons: reproductive autonomy and legal regulation

I would like to invite you to take part in my research study. You have been invited to participate because you have previously frozen your eggs for 'social' reasons at a UK clinic. Participation in this research study is voluntary.

Before you decide, I would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve. I will go through the information sheet with you and answer any questions that you have. Please ask me if anything is unclear.

PART 1

Information about the study

This study is being conducted as part of a Doctorate of Philosophy Degree (PhD) by a student at the University of Kent. This study is funded by the South Eastern Network for Social Sciences (SeNSS), an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) accredited Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP).

This study involves interviews with two sets of participants: (1) clinicians offering 'social' egg freezing; (2) women who have frozen their eggs for 'social' reasons. This information sheet concerns potential participants in group (2).

The purpose of the study

This study seeks to explore the topics of egg freezing for 'social' reasons and reproductive autonomy. Here, the term 'social reasons' refers to situations where women freeze their eggs for any reason other than purely medical infertility and can cover a wide range of factors.

These interviews will focus on how informed consent processes work in practice in this context, and how they are understood by service users and service providers.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you would like to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason.

What will it involve?

Your participation will involve taking part in a confidential interview, conducted virtually (via MS Teams). The interview will last 60-90 minutes and would be recorded (with your permission) so that your responses can be transcribed for inclusion in the analysis. Your responses will be anonymised to protect your confidentiality. Interviews will be transcribed and recordings deleted within 3 months of the interview taking place.

Content of the interview

Some of the themes we would like to ask you about in the interview: 1) Your motivations and reasons behind your decision to freeze your eggs; 2) Your experience as an egg freezing patient at the clinic you attended; 3) Your experience and understanding of the informed consent procedures during your treatment; (4) Your feelings about your fertility and future after having frozen your eggs.

The interview recordings will be transcribed and then analysed using qualitative analysis. The findings and anonymised quotations may be used in subsequent quotations.

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Possible benefits to taking part

This study provides you with the opportunity to express your opinions on egg freezing for 'social' reasons and legal standards of informed consent the UK, an area that is currently under-researched.

Possible risks to taking part

All responses and transcripts will be anonymised, including any and all information that could be considered identifiable, to ensure your confidentiality. All information disclosed during the interview will be analysed after data collection. Individual comments made during the course of the interviews cannot be associated with you or any clinic where you underwent treatment. Therefore, participation in this study, or decision not to participate, will not affect any ongoing or future fertility care.

As part of the interview, discussions may arise concerning your views on informed consent processes in fertility treatment, and the regulation of egg freezing for 'social' reasons. The interview may cover potentially sensitive topics including your experiences of fertility treatment and feelings about your personal fertility and parenthood journey. You should only disclose your views if you feel comfortable to do so.

Research findings

Information about this research project, including findings and subsequent outputs, can be found at <https://research.kent.ac.uk/egg-freezing-research/> (hosted by University of Kent).

PART 2

Confidentiality and ethical considerations

Your responses will be completely confidential, and all steps will be taken to ensure anonymity for all participants in this study. The transcripts of this interview will be coded and anonymised so that you will not be identifiable. All direct quotations will be anonymised.

Each participant will be assigned a unique personal identifier and any personal data relating to this identifier will be kept on the university's secure servers in a password-protected document.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This study is funded by the South Eastern Network for Social Sciences (SeNSS), an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) accredited Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP). Interviews will be conducted by Natalie Richardson from Kent Law School at the University of Kent, Canterbury.

Storage of data

Documents containing participants' personal information will be stored as password protected documents on the University Secure Server, and on the lead researcher's University OneDrive account. These documents will only be accessible by the lead researcher. Participant personal data will be kept for no longer than 12 months following the completion of the study (September 2025 at the latest) in accordance with GDPR and Data Protection Legislation. This is a necessity to complete the PhD, as the researcher must keep all data needed until the Thesis is submitted and approved.

All transcripts will be fully anonymised and no transcripts will contain personal identifying information about participants. Transcripts will only be accessible by the lead researcher and their PhD supervisors.

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After completion of the PhD, anonymised interview transcripts will be passed on to the Kent Academic Repository (KAR), and to the UK Data Archive in agreement with the ESRC scholarship funding. Here, the research materials will be securely stored and made available to other researchers when this research project is completed and the results have been published. On the consent form, participants are able to opt out of their transcript being shared. If the participant opts-out on the consent form, their anonymised transcript will not be passed on.

The transfer of data to the ESRC Data Service (UK Data Archive) and Kent Academic Repository will be subject to a 12 month embargo to ensure that I am able to pursue any additional research outputs before the data can be accessed more widely.

University of Kent Privacy Policy

The University of Kent statement GDPR statement can be found here: <https://research.kent.ac.uk/ris-research-policy-support/wp-content/uploads/sites/2326/2021/06/GDPR-Privacy-Notice-Research.pdf>

Further information and contact details

Natalie Richardson (lead researcher): ncr23@kent.ac.uk

If you have any issues or further concerns please contact Professor Sally Sheldon (PhD supervisor), s.sheldon@kent.ac.uk

For any complaints please contact: Central Research Ethics Advisory Group (University of Kent), centralresearchethics@kent.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this information sheet and considering taking part in this research project.