1	Marital Stability and Quality in Families Created by Assisted Reproductive
2	Technologies: A Follow-up Study
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11	Abstract
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13	An increasing number of children are being born with the use of assisted reproductive
14	techniques (ARTs) such as donor insemination, egg donation and surrogacy. There have
15	been concerns that the use of these third-party reproductive techniques may have a
16	negative effect the quality of the relationship between the mother and father. Marital
17	stability and quality was examined in a UK sample of donor insemination, egg donation,
18	and surrogacy families and families in which children were naturally conceived.
19	Interview and questionnaire assessments of marital stability and quality were collected
20	from mothers and fathers over five time-points, when the children in the families were
21	aged 1, 2, 3, 7 and 10. Of those families who participated when children were 10 years
22	old, a minority of couples in each family type had divorced/separated and few
23	differences emerged between the different family types in terms of mothers' or fathers'
24	marital quality. Despite concerns, couples in families created by donor insemination,
25	egg donation and surrogacy were found to be functioning well.
26	
27	Key words: donor insemination; egg donation; surrogacy; family functioning; marital
28	stability; marital quality.
29	

<u>Summary</u>

32	An increasing number of children are being born with the use of assisted reproductive
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34	have been concerns that the use of these ARTs may have a negative effect the quality of
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that they are unable to experience the pregnancy and birth of a child who is their shared
genetic offspring, which may have involved feelings of grief and loss (Hammer Burns &
Covington 2006).

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63 The quality of the marital relationship has important implications for family functioning 64 in general. Studies utilising observational measures have found that higher levels of 65 affection in the marital relationship are associated with higher levels of affection in the parent-child relationship (Fauchier & Margolin 2004). These findings provide evidence 66 67 for the "spillover hypothesis", in which mood, affect or behaviour are considered to be 68 transferred from one setting to another (Erel & Burman., 1995). Marital quality has also 69 been found to be related to child adjustment. For example, the frequency of marital 70 conflict has been shown to affect children's short-term coping skills as well as long-term 71 adjustment (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Parke & Buriel, 2006). More specifically, high 72 levels of marital conflict have been found to predict both internalising and externalising 73 problems for girls, and externalising problems for boys (El-Sheikh & Whitson 2006).

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75 An early study of donor insemination families conducted in the United States found the 76 rate of parental separation to be low compared to population norms (Amuzu et al., 77 1990). In a similar vein, early studies found the marriages of parents in donor 78 insemination families to be stable and to be functioning within the normal range (Klock 79 & Maier 1991; Klock et al. 1994). In studies of both donor insemination and egg 80 donation families conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, couples reported that the 81 experience of infertility and undergoing fertility treatment had bought them closer 82 together and had improved the quality of their relationships (Applegarth et al. 1995; 83 Leeton & Backwell 1982). The finding that fertility treatment results in an improvement 84 in marital quality has also emerged in studies of couples who have undergone successful 85 fertility treatment using their own gametes (Schmidt et al. 2005; Repokari et al. 2007). 86 Cross-sectional studies can only reveal a snapshot of family functioning at a given time-87 point (often when the long-awaited child has arrived). In order to examine marital

88 stability over time, follow-up studies are required. In the European Study of Assisted 89 Reproduction families, donor insemination, IVF, adoptive and natural conception 90 families were recruited in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Italy and Spain. Family 91 functioning was assessed when the children were aged between 4 and 8 years 92 (Golombok et al. 1996), 12 years (Golombok et al. 2002) and 18 years (Owen & 93 Golombok 2009). By the time the offspring were 18 years old, 12% of couples had 94 separated or divorced, with similar proportions of parents having separated or divorced 95 in the different family types. In terms of the quality of the parents' relationship, few 96 differences were identified for mothers or fathers according to family type throughout 97 the course of the study.

98

In contrast, evidence of instability was found in a follow-up study of donor insemination families in New Zealand: of a sample of 44 families who were revisited 14 years after undergoing fertility treatment with donor sperm, 46% of couples had either divorced or separated (Daniels et al., 2009). Although the rate of separation was not compared to population norms in New Zealand, the authors suggested that this high rate of separation may be related to the degree to which participants had been prepared for their donor insemination treatment.

106

The present study explored marital stability, state and quality in a UK sample of families created through third-party donation (donor insemination, egg donation and surrogacy) and families in which parents conceived naturally over five time-points, when the children in the families were aged 1, 2, 3, 7 and 10.

Materials and Methods

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114 <u>Participants</u>

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116 In the first phase of the study, 50 donor insemination families, 51 egg donation families, 117 42 surrogacy families and a comparison group of 80 natural conception families with a 118 1-year-old child participated. The egg donation and donor insemination families were 119 recruited through 9 fertility clinics in the United Kingdom. All two-parent heterosexual 120 families with a child aged between 9 months and 1 year old were asked to take part in 121 the research. The exclusion criteria were severe congenital abnormalities and multiple 122 births. The natural conception families were selected through maternity ward records 123 on the basis of stratification to maximise comparability with the assisted reproduction 124 samples. The selection criteria were that the child resulted from a singleton birth with a 125 minimum of 30 weeks gestation, the child had no congenital abnormalities, the mother 126 was at least 30 years of age, the child was the mother's first or second child, the mother 127 was married to, or cohabiting with, the child's father, and the pregnancy had been 128 planned (Golombok et al., 2004a). A representative sample of surrogacy families was 129 recruited through the UK Office of National Statistics and the surrogacy agency COTS 130 (Golombok et al., 2004b).

131

132 These families were assessed when the children were aged 1, 2, 3, 7 and 10 years old 133 (response rates for each phase of the study are presented in Table 1). By age 10, the 134 study included 34 families with a child conceived by donor insemination, 30 families 135 with a child conceived by egg donation, 33 families with a child born through surrogacy, 136 and 55 families with a naturally conceived child, representing 68% of the original 137 sample, with no significant difference in retention rates between family types. Rather 138 than actively withdrawing, the majority of those families lost to follow-up had moved 139 home and could not be traced.

140

141 The demographic variables of those families who participated when the children were 142 aged 10 (responders) were compared with those who did not participate at this phase of 143 the study (non-responders). There was no association between whether families 144 participated at age 10 and the following variables: method of conception (assisted

145 reproduction vs. non-assisted reproduction), mothers' intention regarding whether to 146 tell their child about the nature of their conception reported at age 1 (plan to disclose, 147 uncertain, plan not to disclose), mothers' age, and whether the couple had male or 148 female infertility. However, there was a significant association between socioeconomic 149 status measured at age 1 and whether or not families took part at age 10: χ^2 (2) = 6.76, p 150 < .05. Families were categorised as: 1) professional/managerial; 2) skilled non-manual; 151 or 3) skilled manual. Those families classified as professional/managerial were more 152 likely to take part at age 10 (73%), and the families least likely to take part at age 10 153 were those classified as skilled non-manual (56%) and skilled manual (53%).

154

155 Demographic variables were compared between the different family types at each phase of the study. Mothers' age differed between groups, with Helmert contrasts 156 revealing mothers in assisted reproduction families as being significantly older than 157 158 mothers in natural conception families. Helmert contrasts also revealed that mothers in 159 egg donation families were significantly older than mothers in donor insemination 160 families. In addition, there was a significant difference in family size, with a greater 161 number of siblings in natural conception families as compared to assisted reproduction 162 families. Socioeconomic status was also found to differ between family types. The 163 majority of parents in natural conception families were categorised as professional/managerial, whereas socioeconomic status was more evenly spread in the 164 165 donor insemination families.

166

167 Procedure

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Ethical approval for the earlier phases of the study (when children were aged 1, 2 and 3)
was obtained from the City University Ethics Committee, and ethical approval for the
latter phases (when children were aged 7 and 10) was gained from the Cambridge
Psychology Research Ethics Committee. When children were aged 1, 2, 3, 7 and 10, a

173 research psychologist trained in the study techniques visited the families at home. A

174 standardised interview and questionnaire relating to the quality of the marital

175 relationship were administered to mothers and fathers individually.

176

177 <u>Measures</u>

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179 Mothers and fathers were administered both interview and guestionnaire measures to 180 assess marital quality. Questionnaires were administered to mothers and fathers at 181 each phase of the study, whereas interview ratings of mothers' and fathers' marital 182 quality were only collected when children were aged 1, 7 and 10. Interview ratings of 183 marital quality were not obtained when children were aged 2 because a more concise 184 interview schedule was administered to parents that excluded some questions related 185 to marital quality, and when children were aged 3, interviews were only conducted with 186 mothers.

187

188 Questionnaire measure of marital quality: Mothers and fathers completed the 189 Golombok-Rust Inventory of Marital State (Rust et al. 1990), a 36-item guestionnaire 190 assessment of the overall quality of the relationship between couples who are either 191 married or cohabiting. Scores range from 0 to 84, with higher scores indicating poorer 192 marital quality. A score of 34 or more indicates martial dissatisfaction. Split-half reliability for this measure is 0.91 for men and 0.87 for women, and the questionnaire 193 194 has been shown to discriminate between couples who are about to separate and those 195 who are not.

196

197 *Interview measures of marital stability and quality:* As part of a more general

198 assessment of family functioning, a standardised interview designed to measure the

199 quality of the marital relationship was administered to mothers and fathers separately.

200 Information obtained during the interview was rated according to a standardised coding

201 scheme (Quinton & Rutter, 1988). The following ratings were made:

202

203 Marital stability: A rating was made of the family structure (married/cohabiting,
204 divorced/separated).

205

206 Marital quality: Enjoyment of shared activities ranged from: 1 (a great deal), 2 (quite a 207 lot), to 3 (some). Confiding ranged from: 1 (all important matters discussed adequately), 208 2 (the majority of important matters discussed adequately), to 3 (some/ a minority of 209 important matters adequately discussed). Quality of marriage was rated on a 3-point 210 scale, ranging from: 1 (marriage/cohabitation positive source of support and 211 enjoyment), 2 (good marital/cohabitation history), to 3 (overall satisfactory history but 212 some problems, or worse). At each time-point, these three variables yielded a single 213 factor and all factor loadings were moderate to substantial (ranging from .68 to .91). 214 The scores from these three variables were combined to create an index of marital 215 quality. 216 217 Results 218 219 **Marital stability** 220 221 At phase 1 of the study all couples were married/cohabiting. Of those couples who 222 were still participating in the study when the children were 10 years old, 19 (15%) 223 couples had divorced/separated (15% DI, 13% ED, 15% SU, 9% NC). At age 10, there was 224 no difference in marital stability between family types (donor insemination vs. egg 225 donation vs. surrogacy vs. natural conception): χ^2 (3) = 1.37, ns. Those parents who 226 conceived a child using donated sperm, donor eggs or a surrogate were just as likely to 227 remain married/cohabiting after 10 years as those couples who conceived naturally. 228 Likewise, marital status was not associated with the couples' method of conception 229 (ART vs. natural conception): Fisher's Exact test = ns. Parents who conceived using ARTs 230 were just as likely to be married after 10 years as those couples who conceived 231 naturally.

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233	Marital quality
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235	Questionnaire measure
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237	Mothers' and fathers' marital quality was compared between the different family types
238	at each time-point (see Table 2). In terms of mothers' marital quality, the only
239	difference to emerge was when the children in the families were 2 years old ($F(3)$ =
240	2.67, $p < .05$). Helmert contrasts revealed that mothers in natural conception families
241	had higher levels of marital satisfaction (indicated by a lower mean score on the GRIMS)
242	than mothers in ART families.
243	
244	Fathers' marital satisfaction was compared between the different family types at each
245	time-point. No differences were found.
246	
247	Interview measure
248	
249	Mothers' marital quality was compared between the different family types at thee time-
250	points, when children were aged 1, 7 and 10 (see Table 3). A significant difference
251	between groups was found for mothers when the children were aged 7 years old: $F(3) =$
252	2.62, $p = .05$. Helmert contrasts were not statistically significant. Mothers in the
253	surrogacy families had the lowest levels of marital quality, and those in egg donation
254	families had the highest levels.
255	
256	Fathers' marital quality was compared between family types at each phase of the study.
257	Once again, no differences were found between the different family types.
258	
259	The relationship between the demographic variables that differed between groups
260	(mothers' age, family size and socioeconomic status) and the outcome variables that

261	differed significantly different between groups were examined. No significant
262	relationships were found.
263	
264	Discussion
265	
266	Marital stability and marital quality was examined in a longitudinal study of families
267	created by donor insemination, egg donation, surrogacy and families in which parents
268	conceived naturally. Comparisons were conducted at five time-points, when the
269	children in the families were aged 1, 2, 3, 7 and 10. Few differences emerged between
270	the different family types in terms of mothers' or fathers' marital quality as assessed by
271	self-report questionnaire and investigator-based interviews. The couples in all of the
272	different family types appeared to be functioning well.
273	
274	Of the families who were participating when children were 10 years old, a minority of
275	couples in each family type had divorced/separated. This appears to be marginally
276	lower than the average rate of divorce in the UK: statistics from 2005 indicate that
277	approximately 45 per cent of marriages will end in divorce and that almost half these
278	divorces will occur before couples reach their tenth anniversary (Wilson & Smallwood
279	2008). The findings in this study are contrary to the findings of Daniels et al (2009), in
280	which approximately 45% of donor insemination couples had separated when assessed
281	14 years after their original assessment. This disparity could be explained by the
282	differences in sampling techniques, the time that had lapsed between follow-up studies
283	(10 years in the present compared to 14 years in the New Zealand study), or the cultural
284	and social contexts in which the studies were conducted. In addition to the relatively
285	low rate of separation/divorce, mothers' and fathers' scores on the standardised
286	questionnaire of marital state indicated that their levels of marital satisfaction were
287	typically above average.
288	

289 Of interest to future researchers in this field will be the relationship between marital 290 quality and parents decision was to whether to tell the child about their donor 291 conception. In adoption research, fathers who are committed to maintaining a good 292 relationship with their partner have been found to be more likely to be involved in 293 communication about the adoption (Freeark et al, 2008). Mothers' and fathers' level of 294 involvement in adoption communication were also found to be significantly correlated: 295 couples either engaged collaboratively in communication about adoption with their 296 children, or both parents avoided the topic.

297

298 The findings presented in this paper have a number of limitations. Firstly, those families 299 in which couples were experiencing many difficulties may have been the most likely to 300 have dropped out over the ten year span of the study. It is likely that a selection effect 301 has been in play from the time couples started their fertility treatment, as those couples 302 who did not have a strong relationship may have been the least likely to last the course 303 of fertility treatment and go on to have a child. However, it should be noted that in the 304 present study, mothers and fathers' marital quality at age 1 was found to be unrelated 305 to whether or not families participated at age 10. Secondly, this study under-represents 306 families of a lower economic status, as these families were the most likely to drop-out 307 over time. Thirdly, in order to examine marital stability and quality over time and make 308 comparisons between the different family types, a longitudinal statistical approach is 309 desirable. Due to small and diminishing sample sizes, this was not considered to be an 310 appropriate statistical approach in the present study. Although the difficulties of 311 recruiting a sample of this nature cannot be underestimated, future studies would 312 benefit from larger sample sizes. The two differences that did emerge in the analysis (in 313 mothers' marital quality at age 2 as assessed by questionnaire, and age 7 as assessed by 314 interview), may be chance effects resulting from multiple comparisons being conducted. 315 Larger samples would allow for more stringent statistical comparisons to be conducted, 316 and for small differences between groups to be detected over time, were they to exist. 317

318	Despite its limitations, this study is unique in presenting data from donor insemination,
319	egg donation and surrogacy families over five time-points. That few differences
320	emerged between groups contributes to the growing body of research in this field which
321	demonstrates that families created by donor insemination, egg donation and surrogacy
322	are functioning well.
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	DI	ED	SU	NC
Phase 1	50	51	42	80
Phase 2	46	37	68	
% original sample	92%	94%	88%	85%
Phase 3	41	41	34	67
% original sample	82%	80%	81%	84%
Phase 4	36	32	32	54
% original sample	72%	67%	76%	68%
Phase 5	34	30	33	55
% original sample	68%	59%	79%	69%

Table 1: Response Rates for all Family Types at each Phase of the Study

N.B. Sample sizes do not always decrease over time, as in some cases families were unable to participate during one phase of the

study (e.g. a family event, moving house) but were then able to participate at a later phase.

Mothers' Marital Quality														
		DI			ED			SU			NC			
	n	М	SD	n	М	SD	n	М	SD	n	М	SD	F	р
Age 1	46	24.07	9.71	45	23.44	10.44	37	21.62	10.55	75	23.25	10.88	.39	
Age 2	42	27.43	9.61	36	25.19	11.80	29	23.59	9.89	50	21.42	10.29	2.67	<.05
Age 3	36	25.50	10.12	32	26.16	12.11	28	27.43	10.11	56	23.82	10.51	.80	-
Age 7	30	25.73	9.62	26	23.54	11.55	23	24.78	2.39	48	22.85	10.74	.49	-
Age 10	26	25.12	11.54	25	23.56	12.23	22	21.50	7.81	45	22.04	11.81	.57	-
					Fathe	rs' Mari	tal Qı	uality						
		DI			ED			SU			NC			
	n	М	SD	n	М	SD	n	М	SD	n	М	SD	F	р
Age 1	41	21.68	9.11	40	23.67	11.87	34	22.15	10.37	60	22.33	9.70	.28	-
Age 2	34	21.47	9.10	29	24.41	11.17	22	23.50	11.50	40	25.05	8.05	.91	-
Age 3	30	23.00	10.01	26	25.73	8.96	22	22.91	9.81	42	23.31	9.57	.51	-
Age 7	25	21.80	10.20	22	23.23	9.87	18	21.61	11.65	37	24.16	9.46	.39	-
Age 10	20	23.10	11.89	17	25.35	10.37	18	19.67	9.95	35	24.86	10.44	1.14	-

Table 2: CROSS-SECTIONAL ANALYSIS: Mothers' and Fathers' Questionnaire Ratings of Marital Quality

Mothers' Marital Quality														
	DI			ED			SU			NC				
	n	М	SD	n	М	SD	n	М	SD	n	М	SD	F	р
Age 1	49	5.43	1.38	50	4.92	1.48	39	5.18	1.59	78	5.29	1.64	1.01	-
Age 7	31	5.81	1.60	27	5.11	1.60	26	6.04	1.61	50	5.18	1.34	2.62	<.05
Age 10	26	5.69	1.72	23	5.65	1.75	24	5.67	1.40	48	5.33	1.99	.35	-
					Fathe	rs' Marit	al Qu	ality						
		DI			ED			SU			NC			
	n	М	SD	n	М	SD	n	М	SD	n	М	SD	F	р
Age 1	38	5.61	1.55	36	5.03	1.23	27	5.44	1.58	49	5.22	1.40	1.14	-
Age 7	24	5.38	1.53	22	5.50	1.71	22	5.82	1.82	32	5.59	1.37	.32	-
Age 10	18	6.17	1.47	19	5.47	2.04	18	5.50	1.43	27	5.70	2.04	.58	-

Table 3: CROSS-SECTIONAL ANALYSIS: Mothers' and Fathers' Interview Ratings of Marital Quality