

OPINION OF THE CYPRUS NATIONAL BIOETHICS COMMITTEE

Subject: Choosing a future child's sex using the Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) method.

The Cyprus National Bioethics Committee (CNBC), at a meeting on 31.10.2006 and considering an article published on the internet reporting that, couples from Sweden come to Cyprus in order to perform Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) so as to choose the sex of a future child, has published the following opinion:

2. With the PGD method, the ova are fertilized in a test tube. The embryo with the preferred sex, is selected and then implanted in the uterus.
3. Legislation in Cyprus regarding the choice of a future child's sex with the above mentioned method is the following:

Article 4 of the Law 31 (III)/2001 with which the Republic of Cyprus has ratified the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and the Dignity of Human Beings with regard to the Application of Biology and Medicine (Oviedo Convention) states that the prohibited actions or omissions of the provisions of the Convention consist of offences, in accordance with the provisions of the Ratification Law and are classified in two categories and are punished accordingly. Infringement of article 14 of the Convention is an offence that is punished with imprisonment for up to two years and/or a fine up to £5.000.

Article 14, of the Oviedo Convention states that **"the use of techniques of medically assisted procreation shall not be allowed for the purpose of choosing a future child's sex, except where serious hereditary sex related disease is to be avoided"**

4. The absolute legislative prohibition of choosing a future child's sex based on social criteria is extracted from the provisions of article 14 of the Oviedo Convention.

5. Further to this legislative prohibition, the CNBC considers beneficial to point out the bioethical dilemmas and problems arising from the choice of sex of a future child based on social and not medical criteria (also refer to the exceptions set out by article 14 of the Oviedo Convention).

It is the Opinion of CNBC that by the application of techniques for choosing a future child's sex, when there is no risk for the health of the child to be born, the following bioethical dilemmas arise:

(a) the welfare of children and their families due to the following risks:

- children that were selected to be implanted and are probably given birth to, based only on their sex, may be affected psychologically when they find out that when they were still an embryo they were selected to be born this way

- parents may treat these children with some prejudice and may prompt them to achieve their own expectations, limiting their freedom of choice and dignity that every individual is entitled to enjoy.
- the possibility of unfair discrimination (or neglecting other children) of other children in the family compared to the sex selected child exists.
- Concerns arise for the possible consequences that a failure in the choice of sex of the future child may have in the behavior of parents due to their shortfall in achieving their expectations.

(b) Application of the PGD method as a standard practice encompasses the danger of influencing in the future the proportion of the two sexes in a population. Such unbalanced distribution of the two sexes can lead to discriminations against the one or the other sex with proportional repercussions on all aspects of life of the individual but also on the society.

(c) We are supposed to create a society where parents will add on value to their children from their individual characteristics and virtues and not from their sex.

(d) Choice of embryos in vitro with PGD method leads to the destruction of the remaining embryos and in this respect PGD converts life into a product for consumption and also promotes the idea that a “false” sex exists.

(e) Choice of sex of a future child may lead to eugenic practices that harm the integrity, uniqueness and freedom of the individual.

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