



*Fertility Society of Australia
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Vital insights into public attitudes on women seeking medical or social egg freezing to preserve fertility

New research presented at a major medical conference in Melbourne indicates the majority of Australians support social egg freezing allowing women to preserve their fertility until they are ready to start a family.

However, views about social egg freezing to delay child bearing for career or educational advancement or financial purposes varies significantly among those in different age and relationship groups. And, people who had conceived children naturally are significantly less likely to support social egg freezing than people who had not had children.

Monash University researcher Molly Johnston spoke at the annual conference of the Fertility Society of Australia on a survey of 1,127 people to assess public attitudes towards advanced technologies allowing medical and social egg freezing.

Medical egg freezing is an option for women hoping to preserve their reproductive capacity when their fertility is threatened by illnesses such as endometriosis or invasive treatments for cancer.

However, increasing numbers of healthy Australian women are following the global trend to freeze their eggs for fertility preservation providing the option for thawing and IVF treatment in future to have children. Latest data shows that in 2016 there were 1,790 egg freezing cycles in Australia, a 48 per cent increase on the previous year (1,213)

Some of the reasons women delay childbearing and may seek elective egg freezing technology include a lack of a suitable partner, wanting to achieve financial security, or a desire to pursue career opportunities or other personal ambitions. There is also growing evidence of commercial or employer funding of social egg freezing to keep young women in the workforce while delaying motherhood.

The ongoing survey promoted through social media campaigns has to date resulted in 1,127 people aged 18 to 60 completing a multiple choice questionnaire with the data compared across a range of demographic and social variables.

Ms Johnston said today 98 per cent of respondents supported medical egg freezing and 73 per cent agreed with social egg freezing.

“Females were more likely to strongly agree with medical egg freezing than males, but there was no difference between males and females in support of social egg freezing,” she said.

“However, there was notably less support for social egg freezing among people aged 40-plus and those who had been separated or divorced.

“Furthermore, people who had conceived naturally were significantly less likely to support social egg freezing than others who had not had children. We do not have specific data of the reason for this difference of opinion, but some survey participants said adoption should be considered first over egg freezing.

“There was little variance in the level of support for social egg freezing for women who do not have a partner, but significant difference in support for women who choose the freeze option to delay having children for career or educational advancement, or who in current circumstances do not feel financially stable enough to raise a child.

“This is interesting considering that most women choosing social egg freezing do so because they do not have a partner.

“Published data does not indicate whether an egg freeze cycle is for medical or social reason. However, the data collection process is being updated to require units to annually provide this information from 2020.

“Egg freezing technology has improved significantly over the past decade with a corresponding increase in uptake for fertility preservation.

“However, technical progress has outpaced policy development and ethical analysis. It is therefore timely to investigate the public’s views about access to egg freezing to inform and provide evidence for future policy direction.

“And so far our findings indicate the policy is out of step with public attitudes.”

The Fertility Society of Australia conference is being held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Interview: Molly Johnston is available for interview. To arrange, please contact Trevor Gill, FSA Media Relations, on 0418 821948 or e-mail lighthousepr@adelaide.on.net