

Same-donor offspring networks: Donor-conceived people's experiences with making contact, through group meetings, with same-donor offspring.

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Specialist help in case of
unwanted pregnancies and
for questions about ancestry

Background

A recent phenomenon is the contact of donor-conceived people with offspring of the same donor. Donor-conceived people can find large numbers of same-donor offspring, partly enabled by more openness regarding donor conception, online searches, social media, donor registers and (online) DNA testing. So far, the impact of meeting large numbers of same-donor offspring has not been explored.



Study question

What are the experiences of donor-conceived people with making contact, through group meetings, with same-donor offspring?

Methods

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 donor-conceived people, registered in the Fiom KID-DNA Database. Participants were recruited from same-donor offspring group meetings (n=6) that were organised by Fiom counsellors between May 2017 and February 2018. A total of 82 donor-conceived persons were present at the meetings (30% male, 70% female).

Participants

Participants were female, 15-42 years old (M= 30; SD=8.6), born into a hetero (n=12), single (n=3) or lesbian (n=4) household. The groups of same-donor offspring consisted of 7-18 donor-offspring at time of group meetings, extending to 8-31 at time of interviews.

Results

Most participants (n=13) started searching for the donor and had not thought about same-donor offspring upfront, others (n=4) were solely interested in contact with same-donor offspring, or (n=2) wanted to know if their sisters were full-genetic siblings.

Three main motivations to search:

- curiosity (n=19)
- the wish to receive medical information (n=11)
- the wish to extend their family, arising from feeling different (n=5) or missing family (n=7).

Meetings went together with various emotions:

- shock and feeling overwhelmed of being confronted with so many half-siblings (n=14)
- tension due to insecurity, the unknown and uncomfortable feelings (n=17)
- restless feelings due to the lack of a framework how and where to situate these new relationships (n=12)
- satisfaction and excitement (n=18)
- All participants (n=19) expected to find resemblances (physically and/or personality-wise), but not all found them (n=2).

Specific challenges:

- the continuous expansion of the group
- differences in privacy boundaries and information sharing (about the donor).

Message

This data shows that while relationships with same-donor offspring are commonly viewed as generally more beneficial than connecting with a donor, they can cause confusion and leave questions about how to integrate these new relations into their lives, as family, kinship, and/or friendship. These findings may be a starting point for developing needs-orientated counselling for donor-conceived people searching for same-donor offspring.