

Demographic and family-based predictors of Dutch societal attitudes towards surrogacy

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Background

In many countries, surrogacy is marked by controversy. Current public and political debates regarding legislation on surrogacy show diverse and shifting attitudes toward surrogacy. Previous studies hint at attitudes toward surrogacy being influenced by demographic factors such as age, education, sexual preference, ethnicity, urbanization and religiosity.

What we don't know

We don't know how aspects of surrogacy arrangements such as parental composition (cisgender different-sex parents, same-sex parents and transgender parents) and social or genetic bonds between the surrogate, oocyte donor and parents influence societal attitudes toward surrogacy. No previous studies of attitudes toward surrogacy have been done in the Dutch population.

Research question

What factors shape societal attitudes toward surrogacy in a representative sample of the adult population?


Method

Attitudes about surrogacy were measured with the help of online vignettes. These vignettes were about two intended parents forming their family with the help of a surrogate and/or an oocyte donor. Accompanied by the vignettes was a 6-item questionnaire. Questions were answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (entirely disagree) to 5 (entirely agree). Each participant responded to four vignettes, and a sum score was calculated per vignette to measure participants' attitudes.


Outcome: Mean of scores on each vignette, with a higher score meaning more favourable attitudes. Mean scores could range from 1 to 5.

Variations on vignettes


Family

 *Cis-man cis-woman*
Cis-man cis-man
Cis-man trans-woman


Surrogate

 *Sister* (social and genetic bond)
Friend (social but no genetic bond)
Previously unknown (no social, no genetic bond)

Oocyte donor

 *Intended mother* (within cis-man cis-woman families)
Sister (social and genetic bond)
Friend (social but no genetic bond)
Oocyte bank (no social, no genetic bond)

About the researcher

 Sanne Agterberg, MSc is a PhD candidate at the University of Amsterdam. Her focus is on the well-being of families that are created with the help of a surrogate.
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Sample

In this study, 1075 respondents were included from the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) panel administered by Centerdata (Tilburg University, The Netherlands). The LISS panel consists of a representative sample of the Dutch population based on a probability sample of households drawn from the population register.

Age M(SD)	Religion* M(SD)	Urbanisation** M(SD)	Gender Woman	Background Only Dutch	Sexual identity Heterosexual
50.51 (17.60)	2.00 (1.03)	3.22 (1.43)	46.6%	78.0%	84.8%

*Higher score = more religious. Scores ranged from 1 to 4
** Higher score = more urbanized. Scores ranged from 1 to 5

Analysis

A multilevel analysis was performed with vignettes clustered within respondents.

Implications

Based on our findings, it will be possible to inform cisgender different-sex, same-sex and transgender parents about the societal reactions they might encounter. The negative attitudes towards known oocyte donors warrants us to initiate future research.

Results

Scores on vignettes ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.79$)

Predictor	p	Beta(SE)
Demographic factors		
Intercept	<.001	0.00(0.00)
Age	.211	-0.04(0.03)
Education	.003	0.09(0.03)
Heterosexual (vs. other) ^a	.005	-0.08(0.03)
Only Dutch background (vs. other) ^b	.007	0.08(0.03)
Urbanization	.834	0.01(0.03)
Religiosity	< .001	-0.19(0.03)
Factors of the surrogacy arrangement		
Cis-man & cis-man ^c	<.001	-0.07(0.01)
Cis-man & transgender-woman ^d	<.001	-0.07(0.01)
Genetic bond surrogate ^e	.553	-0.01(0.01)
Social bond surrogate ^f	.197	0.01(0.01)
Genetic bond oocyte donor ^g	.053	0.02(0.01)
Social bond oocyte donor ^h	<.001	-0.04(0.01)
Surrogate utilising own oocytes ⁱ	.627	0.00(0.01)

^a0 = not heterosexual, 1 = heterosexual

^b0 = belonging to ethnic minority, 1 = only a Dutch background

^c0 = cis-man cis-woman, 1 = cis-man cis-man

^d0 = cis-man cis-woman, 1 = cis-man transgender-woman

^e0 = no genetic bond with the surrogate, 1 = genetic bond with the surrogate

^f0 = no social bond with the surrogate, 1 = genetic social with the surrogate

^g0 = no genetic bond with the oocyte donor, 1 = genetic bond with the oocyte donor

^h0 = no social bond with the oocyte donor, 1 = social bond with the oocyte donor

ⁱ0 = Surrogate does not utilize her own oocytes 1 = surrogate utilizes her own oocytes

Conclusion

Participants had mildly positive attitudes toward surrogacy. Differences in demographic factors of participants (education, sexuality, ethnicity, religiosity), as well as characteristics of surrogacy families (parental composition, social bond oocyte donor) were associated with differences in the attitudes participants held toward surrogacy.

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