For many women, such as the 1 per cent under 40 who have a premature menopause, the shortage of
donated eggs for IVF causes heartache and frustration. If more donated eggs were available, these women’s
hopes of a family might be realised. But is paying women to donate eggs the solution? Egg donation is an
invasive and unpleasant process. Even the best scientific efforts will never make it risk-free. With the removal
of anonymity, it is not surprising that donation rates are so low. Of course, we need to make sure that no
vulnerable woman is exploited by selling her eggs for IVF.

Although the system protects vulnerable women in Britain, it does not protect those in other countries who are
selling their eggs to reproductive tourists.

Banning donor payment may also be an overly protectionist approach. Well-informed women will be more
than capable of weighing up the risks and benefits of donation, including the incentive of payment.

If paying women to donate eggs for IVF is to be reconsidered, numerous safeguards must be put in place.
Donation must be accompanied by rigorous counselling and a compulsory “cooling off” period. There must be
strict controls on advertising. We must also ensure that all other avenues, such as better resourced
campaigns to recruit altruistic donors, have been exhausted.

Rather than seeing this as a payment issue, we could revisit the idea of reasonable compensation for the
burden of egg retrieval, rather than paying for the eggs. Increasing the capped amount that women are given
for donating eggs may increase donation. It will also help to emphasise the altruism behind donation, not
forgetting the importance of the gift being made.

As reproductive technologies continue to advance, new ways of having a family continue to emerge.
Ultimately there are many ways for people to become parents.

Social interference should be limited to where a child is at significant risk of harm, although parents must be
encouraged to be open with children about their origins. Let’s not forget that IVF technologies have helped
thousands of couples to take on one of the most important jobs in the world: being a parent.

Dr Ainsley Newson is senior lecturer in biomedical ethics at Bristol University
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