Should an age limit be imposed on *in vitro* fertilization?

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**in vitro** Fertilization (IVF)

- 1) Removal of the human oocyte (egg) from the ovary
- 2) Fertilization by the sperm of a partner or donor in a laboratory
- 3) Transfer of the fertilized egg (embryo) back into the uterus
History

- Louise Brown was first reported live birth conceived by *in vitro* fertilization in 1978 in England
  - The procedure was completed by Dr. Edwards and Dr. Steptoe
- The first baby conceived by *in vitro* fertilization in the United States was in 1981
- Currently over 100,000 babies in the United States have been conceived through IVF
  - Today a fertility hormone (FSH) is used to stimulate the development of several eggs which can be easily removed from the female

The Issue

- IVF offers a chance for infertile couples to have a biological child
- However, there is much debate as to whether or not an age limit should be imposed on IVF
- Proponents of an age limit point out the complications of older women giving birth and reasons why an older parent is not as optimal as a younger one
- Opponents of an age limit contend that every parent has the freedom and the right to have a child, and older parents may in fact be more ideal
Increasing Age of Parents

- 1992 – A British woman gave birth to twins at the age of 59
- 1993 – Rosanna Della Corte gives birth to a healthy boy at the age of 62*
- 2005 – Adriana Iliescu gives birth to Eliza Maria Iliescu at age 66*

* World’s Oldest Woman to Give Birth (at that time)

Is Age an Issue?

Won’t Someone Please Think of the Children!

- We must think in terms of the best interest of the child
Some Stats

- In general older women have a higher chance of miscarriage
  - Study conducted at Cornell University from 1991-1996
  - Over 2,000 pregnancies were examined in New York hospitals

Some More Stats

- Birth Defects

http://www.usnews.com/usnews/health/briefs/womenshealth/bb040712d.htm

http://cancerresourcecenter.com/articles/article33.html
Some More Stats

- Down syndrome (Trisomy 21)
  - 1 in 1,250 for 25 year old women
  - 1 in 1,000 for 30 year old women
  - 1 in 400 for 35 year old women
  - 1 in 30 for 45 year old women

http://www.marchofdimes.com/professionals/681_1155.asp

Are Some Parents Too Old?

A mother giving birth at 50 will be 68 when her child graduates high school
Adriana Iliescu will be 84 when Eliza Maria graduates high school

- Do older parents have the energy it takes to raise a child?
  - Older parents may be unable to meet the emotional and physical needs required to properly raise a child
Are Some Parents Too Old?

- What if the parents die of old age before the child is grown?
  - Older parents are more likely to pass away during crucial developmental stages in the child’s life
  - Thus, the child is short-changed before even being born

- At what point does the child have to take care of his parents? Before the child is grown and has a life of his own?
  - Having older parents can place excess stress on the child if they become ill

Is It Fair to the Parents?

A Case of Desperation

- Parents seeking IVF are out of other options

- "Success rates begin to decline after age 23. After age 46, the chances are zero."

- Is it fair for a clinic to take advantage of a parent’s undying hope for success?

http://www.healthatoz.com/healthatoz/Atoz/dc/caz/repr/infr/infertility.jsp

Additional Complications of \textit{in vitro} Fertilization
Risk of Multiple Births

- 38% of IVF births were multiple births compared with < 3% in the general population
- Risk of stillbirth or neonatal death
  - 1% singletons
  - 4.7% twins
  - 8.3% triplets
- Multiple births are greater burden on older parents (on the mother during labor and on both parents after delivery)


It’s Just Plain Unnatural
The Other Side of *in vitro* Fertilization

Topics To Be Considered
- Infringing on Patients’ and Physicians’ Rights
- Who Decides When It Is Too Late?
- Information for All
- The Benefits of Older Parents
- Population is Aging and *in vitro* Fertilization Methods are improving

Doctors’ and Patients’ Rights
- An arbitrary age = Inability for patients and doctors to make a decision
- Physicians have been trained to assess situations
  - Why should we take that ability away from them?
  - Doctor’s can still choose not to perform the procedure
- Rights equate Responsibility
  - Patients have the ability to choose and must deal with those consequences
  - This is the same for physicians

Informed Choices

Many in vitro Fertilization Clinics provide mandatory information on:
- Possible Medical Risks
- Procedure Information
- Psychological Risks
- Possible Birthing Problems
- Contingency plans for possible problem situations

Many clinics also use psychological counseling:
- Look into possible long term issues
- Make sure parents are ready to handle the child

If these informative measures are being implemented, why is there a need for an age limit?
Older Parents are Bad?

Benefits of Older Parents

- Financial Stability
- Fewer career pressures
- Emotional maturity
- Child is not an accident
Humans are living longer and technology is improving

- Human Beings are living longer, so it isn’t as urgent to have children at a younger age.
- As life spans increase, the time period in which a parent could live and support a child would also increase
  - An arbitrary age limit would not take into account this factor
- *in vitro* Fertilization methods are improving
  - Like most technology used over time, the procedure will continue to improve, moving towards even higher success rates
  - This gives parents more time to choose when they want to have a child. A cutoff age would limit that choice.
Questions

- Given that technology is advancing to improve the quality of life, questions of societal morality arise:
- Is childbearing a woman’s choice?
- Do the civil rights of youth carry through to later in life?

Women’s Rights

- Women have the right to choose to have a child while they are younger
- Women, just like men, are constitutionally guaranteed the right to happiness
- Why would these rights (choice and happiness) become void in older age?
Women Postponing Childbirth for a Career

- Women’s rights were hard-won. In 1972 the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was passed.
- Women now have the right to be expected to be treated equally in the workplace.
- To pass a law limiting a woman’s right to bear children undermines the ERA and forces women to choose between a place at home or a place equal to those of men in the workforce.

Summary: Two Sides

*Should an age limit be imposed?*

- Statistics suggesting IVF later in life is dangerous
- Moral questions regarding child rearing
- Doctor’s right to refuse treatment
- Technological advancements in the field
- Civil liberties must be protected
- Patient’s right to treatment