



Genetics and Public Policy Center

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Genetic Testing of Embryos to Pick “Savior Sibling” Okay with Most Americans

New Survey Explores Attitudes on Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD)

Washington, D.C.— A new survey by the Genetics and Public Policy Center at The Johns Hopkins University shows most Americans approve of using genetic testing and selection of embryos to make sure a baby will be a good match to donate blood or tissue to a sick brother or sister. But, they disapprove of selecting an embryo based on whether the baby will be a girl or boy.

Preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) involves the removal and genetic analysis of one or two cells from embryos created through in vitro fertilization. Test results are then used to select embryos to transfer to a woman’s womb to initiate a pregnancy. While PGD was originally developed to prevent transmission of serious diseases, recently it has been used to pick embryos based on sex or suitability as a tissue donor.

To measure public attitudes toward these uses of PGD and other reproductive genetic technologies, the Genetics and Public Policy Center, which is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, conducted a detailed survey of 4,005 Americans, the largest to date by far.

The survey showed that 61 percent approve of using PGD to select an embryo that could benefit an ailing sibling, while 33 percent disapprove of this use. In contrast, 57 percent of the respondents disapprove of using PGD to select embryos based on sex.

“There is strong support for using these technologies when there is a health benefit, even when that benefit is for another person, but this support coexists with deep-seated worries about where all these new technologies may be taking us,” said Kathy Hudson, Ph.D., the founder and Director of The Johns Hopkins University Genetics and Public Policy Center.

For example, 80 percent of respondents were concerned that if not regulated, reproductive genetics technologies such as PGD could “get out of control.”

Some countries prohibit using PGD for sex selection or to choose embryos that will be suitable tissue donors unless it will also avoid disease in the resulting child. The United States has imposed no legal restrictions on the uses of PGD.

The survey was conducted in April 2004 by Knowledge Networks to solicit public opinion on the range of policy and regulatory approaches outlined in a January 2004 [Center Report](#) on PGD. A detailed evaluation of the survey results is expected this summer.

The Genetics and Public Policy Center is a part of the Phoebe R. Berman Bioethics Institute at The Johns Hopkins University and is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts. The mission of the Genetics and Public Policy Center is to create the environment and tools needed by decision makers in both the private and public sectors to carefully consider and respond to the challenges and opportunities that arise from scientific advances in genetics.

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