

# Global market: the European oocyte economy

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*At present, there is no European market of oocytes for research purposes*

Oocyte donation for research purposes has become a matter of concern for different types of actors such as researchers, feminists, international organizations, regulatory authorities, bioethicists for different reasons.

However, in Europe the practice is rare (UK; Spain; Sweden; Belgium?).

More *empirical* studies are needed on the subject.

Rather than the European oocyte economy, the subject of study are tendencies of **economization** and **de-economization** of oocytes in the context of research.

Human eggs are touchy, sensitive and rare

Unlike some other tissues circulating in the tissue economy, human oocytes are

- painful to harvest,
- extremely difficult to store and preserve without damage,
- impossible to multiply.

Eggs are (still) of extremely restricted mobility.

Disentanglement and mobilization are constitutive for economization. These processes are currently impeded by the touchiness of eggs.

Processes of economization and de-economization form a moving, multidimensional puzzle, constituted by:

the supply of human oocytes: women's willingness to donate,  
existence of a spatiotemporal infrastructural (*from clinic to lab*),  
the demand for oocytes for *fertility* treatment,  
legal restrictions,  
ethical concerns, political opposition...

the attractiveness of *alternative* research strategies that do not require human oocytes (cybrids, iPSCells, SCs from the testes or parthenotes...or non-patientspecific cell lines),

the availability of additional or alternative sources of human eggs (ovariectomies, iPSC-derived gametes, in vitro maturation...),

However, “ethical alternatives” may create new ethical problems. iPS cell-derived gametes could be used for creating embryos or reproductive cloning.

Commodification of ovaries instead of oocytes?

Ethical-innovational regress?

*If* therapeutic cloning is to be pursued as a research strategy, there will be an inherent tendency towards remuneration

As long as human oocytes are sensitive, touchy and rare, remuneration forms a potentially attractive strategy of mobilization. It could

- motivate (more) women to undergo egg retrieval,
- motivate women to travel long distances to research sites (and thus form an alternative to transport eggs).

Without (different forms) of remuneration, stem cell research using human oocytes is unlikely to proceed.

## Issues of 'regulation and remuneration'

Issues of justice and equality: prevent exploitation through excluding the poor and the uneducated?

Lower reimbursement in poorer countries, in order to avoid "undue inducement"? (Baylis/McLeod)

Issues of security and surveillance: create comprehensive donor registries to prevent excessive retrieval?

The medical subjects paradigm: applicable in basic research? Balance which risks with which and whose (expectations of) benefits?

Will a regulated market foreclose the emergence of a black market?