

# Study throws spotlight on lesbian parenting

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Lesbians who turn to sperm donors to conceive are finding it easier to do so, but only if they have the money to pay for it, according to a new study.

Dr Petra Nordqvist from The University of Manchester says despite recent changes in attitudes, many couples are still forced to use the Internet or friends to find men willing to help them have children because of the prohibitive cost of using fertility clinics.

Couples wealthy enough to use fertility clinics are protected by law from donors who may later demand access to the child.

However, couples who use private means to find donors - commonly internet message boards but also friends - are more vulnerable to conflicts about custody and access after the birth.

She carried out a series of 25 interviews with couples over one year for her research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council - the largest group yet studied.

No data exists on the numbers of lesbian couples who have conceived, making it difficult for researchers to track them down.

The interviews also revealed how like heterosexual families, lesbian couples crave being conventional, but also that they go to extraordinary lengths to protect their children from stigma.

The couples studied by Dr Nordqvist, based at the University's Morgan Centre for the Study of Relationships and [Personal Life](#), conceived between late 1990s and 2008.

She said: "The findings of the study accurately reflect the experience of [lesbians](#) couples who want to conceive.

"No data is available to show how common it is for them to have children using donor conception following changes in the law - and other factors - but attitudes have shifted drastically making it far easier.

"Even five years ago, many couples were turned away from clinics because they were lesbians.

"But even though it is now easier in some respects, the huge cost of fertility treatment in clinics excludes many lesbians."

The legal situation changed when the Human Embryology and Fertilisation Act 2008 retained the duty to take account of child welfare in providing [fertility treatment](#) as outlined in the 1990 act.

But it replaced the reference to "the need for a father" with "the need for supportive parenting" - highlighting the role of all parents including lesbians.

She added: "Like most families, lesbians base their choice of donor on things like ethnicity, family resemblances, facial characteristics and levels of education.

"But couples who cannot afford clinical treatment sometimes go to extraordinary lengths to anonymise the process - for example not exchanging surnames and addresses with a donor found on an internet chatroom."

Provided by University of Manchester

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