



The psychological wellbeing of surrogates and their families

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Research questions



- Do surrogate mothers experience psychological problems (depression, self-esteem) in the long term?
- Do they stay in contact with the intended parents and the surrogacy child?
- How do surrogates view their relationship with the family?
- Do the surrogates own children experience psychological problems and what do they think about their mothers involvement in surrogacy?
- How do surrogates children view their relationship to the surrogacy child?

Sample



- Current study: follow-up study of 34 surrogates seen 1 year after birth of surrogacy child.
(Jadva, Murray, Lycett, MacCallum and Golombok, 2003)
- 20 followed up 10 years later + 14 surrogates
- 36 children of surrogates (14 male, 22 female)
 - 23 families
 - age 12-25 years

Demographics



Own children	n (%)
Yes	33(97%)
No	1(3%)
Marital status	
Married/co-habiting	22(65%)
Non-co-habiting partner	3(9%)
Divorced/separated	7(21%)
Single	2(6%)
Occupation	
Professional/managerial	12(35%)
Skilled non-manual	12(35%)
Skilled manual	6(18%)
Partly skilled	4(12%)
Type of surrogacy	
Traditional	12(35%)
Gestational	14(41%)
Traditional and gestational	8(24%)

Results: Motivations



- 59% (20) wanting to help a childless couple
- 15% (5) 'wanting to help a childless couple' & 'enjoyment of pregnancy'
- 9% (3) wanted to help a relative
- 6% (2) wanted to help a friend
- 11% (4) other
- Other themes:
 - Seeing others struggle with infertility
 - Valuing own children and family

Results: Motivations for subsequent surrogacies



- 31% (21) wanting to help a family have a sibling for child
- 23% (16) wanting to help a childless couple
- 15% (10) having previous positive experiences of surrogacy
- 7% (5) enjoyment of pregnancy
- 6% (4) unfulfilled expectations or aims from a previous surrogacy
- 3% (2) payment
- 3% (2) request from a surrogacy organisation
- 3% (2) not intended to do further surrogacies but had met a couple she wished to help
- 9% (6) Other

Results: Self-esteem and Depression



Surrogates' scores for self esteem and depression

	Gestational	Traditional	Gestational & Traditional	Total
Rosenberg Self-Esteem				
Above average	4(29)	1(9)	1(17)	6(19)
Average	10(71)	10(91)	4(66)	24(77)
Below average			1(17)	1(3)
Beck Depression Inventory				
Minimal	14(100)	9(82)	5(83)	28(90)
Mild		2(18)		2(6)
Moderate			1(17)	1(3)
Severe				0(0)
Total	14	11	6	31

No differences in self esteem and depression between surrogates who had completed gestational, traditional or both types of surrogacy

Results: Do surrogates stay in contact with the family?



Across all 102 surrogacy arrangements

- Surrogates stayed in contact with 77% of surrogacy children, 85% of mothers and 76% of fathers

Frequency of contact for those in contact

	Child (n = 79)		Mother (n = 62)		Father (n = 65)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
At least once a week	1	1	10	16	3	5
1xweek – 1x month	7	9	20	32	8	12
1xmonth – 1x3 months	29	37	19	31	24	37
1 or 2 a year	42	53	13	21	30	46

Results: Feelings about level of contact



Feelings about level of contact

	Contact with child		Contact with mother		Contact with father	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Not enough	7	8	3	5	3	5
About right	71	15	59	6	60	15
Too much	1	0	0	0	2	0

7/8 contact stopped by couple

7 in contact with parents
4 no contact wanted
2 will be in contact when child is older
1 no contact due to couples preference
1 no contact agreed with couple

Results: How do surrogates view their relationship with the child?



- 76% of relationships with surrogacy children were viewed as positive

"I think the world of her, there's nothing maternal there but I love her to bits... she'll always be a special little girl to me"

- 11% as neutral

"I think it's like any of my friends' children, I don't get personally involved with them even when they come to visit me".

- 10% no relationship
- 3% child too young

Results: What do we call each other?



'auntie'

'niece/nephew'

'special auntie'

'tummy
mummy'

'my name'

Results: How do surrogates view their relationships with the couples?



- 89% of relationships with mothers, 85% of relationships with fathers were viewed as positive

“We can just all be ourselves and we know nobody’s perfect, but having been through so much with the surrogacies you just get to see it all [laughs], and it’s nice to have people around that you don’t feel you need to put up any barriers, you can just be”
- Neutral/ambivalent relationships reported with 8% of mothers and 9% of fathers

[father]’s fine, I don’t tend to have a long conversation with him because he just doesn’t, but that’s not to say there’s anything wrong with him, it’s just he’s not one for chatting, but he’s perfectly ok’.
- No relationship reported with 3% of mothers and 6% of fathers

Results: Do findings differ between gestational and traditional surrogacy?



- No difference between gestational and traditional surrogacy arrangements in terms of:
 - whether or not surrogates and surrogacy families stayed in contact
 - surrogates' frequency of contact with the child
 - whether or not surrogates were happy with their level of contact
 - whether or not they viewed the relationship as positive
- Difference between gestational and traditional surrogacy arrangements in terms of:
 - more frequent contact with IP's for gestational surrogates
 - gestational surrogates more likely to report a special bond with the child compared to traditional surrogates

Surrogates Children



	Median	Range
Age at time of study (years)	17	12–25
Age at mother's first surrogacy (years)	6	2–15
Number of surrogacy arrangements	3	1–8
	<i>n</i>	%
Male	14	39
Female	22	61
Parents' relationship status		
Married/cohabiting	16	44
Divorced/separated	20	56
Type of surrogacy		
Genetic (traditional)	14	39
Gestational	15	44
Genetic and gestational	7	19

Results: Psychological health



	N	%
Rosenberg Self-Esteem		
Above average	12	40
Average	15	50
Below Average	3	10
General Health Questionnaire-30		
Above 5	2	7
Below 5	25	93

Results: How involved is the surrogates family



The extent of families' involvement in the surrogacy process varied

- Surrogacy kept separate from family life

“she keeps it separate from us really, so it doesn't really affect us. It's just family with a bump”

(child of traditional surrogate)

- Whole family involved in surrogacy process

“we talk about it as a couple...we are a couple and we do things as a couple and surrogacy is one of the things we do as a couple”

(partner of gestational surrogate)

Results: How do surrogates' partners view surrogacy?



90% partners held positive views about surrogacy

“it... can make people parents who desperately want to be parents who for no reason of their own cannot be... I can only see it in a positive light I have to say, genuinely, only in a positive light”

(Partner of gestational surrogate)

Results: How do surrogates' children view surrogacy?



86% (31) saw their mothers involvement in surrogacy as positive

"I think it's a brilliant thing...I think just for someone to go through what my mum went through to make someone else happy I think it's just amazing how someone would do that for someone else"
(Child of gestational surrogate)

14% (5) saw it as neutral/indifferent

"Um, I don't have a problem with it, if mum wants to do it that's her prerogative."

(Child of a traditional surrogate)

Results: Surrogates' children



Difficult aspects of surrogacy	n
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Maintaining a relationship with surrogacy child	5
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Health complications for the surrogate	3
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Negative comments from others	3
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Surrogate not being able to take child out	1
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Baby being handed over	1
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Seeing surrogate upset	1
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Results: Surrogates' children



Rewarding aspects of surrogacy	n
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Relationship with the child and IPs	7
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Being proud of mum	6
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Helping another family	5
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Seeing mum happy	5
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Travelling and meeting people	4
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Positive effect on own family	2
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Results: Surrogates' children



What would make surrogacy easier?	n
Surrogacy less taboo/more awareness	3
Living closer to IPs	2
Having better relationship with IPs	1
Surrogate having easier pregnancy	1

Results: What do we call each other?



'brother/sister'

'surrosister'

'half-
brother/half-
sister'

'surrogate
brother'

'tummy sister'

'sort of cousin'

Conclusions



- Surrogates do not experience long-term psychological problems as a result of their involvement in surrogacy
- Most surrogates maintained contact with the surrogacy family, and most surrogates and surrogacy families continued to see each other in person
- Surrogates families felt positive about the surrogates involvement in surrogacy
- Few differences were found between surrogates who had done traditional, gestational or both types of surrogacy

Indian Surrogates



- Sample
 - 50 surrogates from one clinic in Mumbai – all for international intended parents
 - 69 expectant mothers from general hospital in Delhi and Mumbai
- Seen at 2 time points
 - During pregnancy (4-9th month)
 - After birth (4-6 months)
- Data collected on:
 - Anxiety, depression and stress
 - Level of bonding to the foetus (Maternal-Fetal Attachment Scale)
 - Instrumental Prenatal bonding (care and attentive to foetus)
 - Emotional Prenatal bonding (interacting and attributing characteristics to foetus)
 - Experiences of surrogacy

Results



- Surrogates showed higher levels of depression compared to comparison group during pregnancy and after birth
- No differences between groups for anxiety and stress
- Surrogates showed lower levels of emotional prenatal bonding and higher instrumental bonding compared to expectant mothers

Results: Factors associated with surrogates psychological well-being



- Lower perceived support during pregnancy, hiding surrogacy and receiving criticism for being a surrogate significantly predicted higher levels of depression after the birth of the baby.
- Surrogates with lower educational status and who had a positive experience at the surrogate house were more likely to emotionally bond with the foetus.

Conclusions



- Surrogates were more likely to show high levels of depression than comparison group of expectant mothers. This might be due to their circumstances prior to surrogacy.
- Factors to do with the surrogacy (such as meeting the intended parents) may improve their experiences.
- Limitations: Sample recruited from one clinic.



References

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