

Under the microscope, an injection needle that has aspirated sperm is pierced into the Lochte and injected with sperm.
Source:China Visual

A Grey Industry Needed by Some Unmarried Women in China

By Liu Linbo

"I am not going to get married, but I will have my own child, a test-tube baby."

Wang Fang, a 40-year-old woman working in cosmetics in Shanxi, made this decision during the Spring Festival in 2022, when she couldn't stand the disturbance of her parents urging her to get married.

Test-tube baby is the common name of in vitro fertilization and embryo transfer. At present, assisted reproductive technology is the main mean to help unmarried women have a baby. It is a technique that uses medical technology and methods to artificially manipulate human eggs, sperm, fertilized eggs or embryos for the purpose of conception. It includes artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization and embryo transfer, as well as various derivative techniques.

Ms. Wang is one of the women in China who is

unmarried but wants to have a child. Searching on social platforms such as Weibo, Zhihu and Xiaohongshu with keywords such as single, fertility and women, Pearl News reporter has found over a thousand posts about single women having their own children through assisted reproductive technology. These posts include medical advertisements about reproductive centers and some shares from unmarried women who have already done this technique.

The Technical Specification for Human Assisted Reproductive Technology Sperm Bank promulgated by the Ministry of Health of China in July 2003 clearly stipulates that assisted reproductive technology is prohibited for unmarried women to avoid ethical and social problems. However, until now, China has not issued specific legal provisions to punish institutions or individuals who use assisted reproductive technology to give birth to unmarried women. In this context, the gray industry has emerged.

Existing Problems

“Probably because I had searched for related content, some ads popped up in my phone promising singles that in vitro fertilization could be achieved in the country. They said the treatment would be done in private hospitals and the total cost is about 100,000 to 150,000 yuan. They can screen the sex of the fetus upon my request. In addition, they said I could pick the sperm if I wanted. I could get details about the sperm donor’s appearance, height, education level, and even ask for double eyelids. But this requires an additional charge of 20,000 to 30,000 yuan,” said Ms. Wang.



An advertisement about assisted reproductive technology popped up on Wang Fang’s mobile phone on March 15, 2022.

Photo provided by Wang Fang

In fact, these services, which appear to be satisfactory to consumers, have many irregularities.

They violate the principles of blindness and confidentiality in the Ethical Principles of Human Assisted Reproductive Technology issued by the Ministry of Health, which stipulates that whenever assisted reproductive technology is performed using donor sperm, eggs, or embryos, the donor, the recipient couple, the offspring born and the medical personnel involved in the operation must remain blind, and medical institutions and medical staff

must keep information about the donor and recipient confidential. They also violate the principles of strict prevention of commercialization that donor sperm, egg and embryo donations should be for the purpose of the donor and trading is prohibited.

The act of identifying the sex of the fetus violates the relevant provisions of Population and Family Planning Law of the Peoples Republic of China, the Measures for the Administration of Human Assisted Reproductive Technology, and the Ethical Principles of Human Assisted Reproductive Technology, etc.

In addition, an underlying issue is where the sperm comes from. Chinese official sperm banks are not open to unmarried women. “Does it guarantee that the sperm is supplied from a human sperm bank approved by the Ministry of Health? Is there a sperm test certificate? Does it ensure that each sperm donor’s semen specimen can only be offered to a maximum of 5 women for conception? All of these can affect the health of the future baby and the risks of genetic diseases and blood borne infectious diseases will increase,” said Wang Jing fang, an associate chief physician of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Second Hospital of Shanxi Medical University.

Need and Reasons

“I feel this industry is a bit chaotic. After all, assisted reproductive technology is not allowed for single women in China. However, I’m already 40 and I have no time to wait,” said Ms. Wang.

Age is the primary consideration for unmarried women who want to have children. Age affects woman’s fertility. Women have 0.7-2 million primordial follicles as newborns, and only 400-500 follicles can develop and mature into eggs. Furthermore, both the number of eggs and the quality of egg cells in women decline over time. Once the age exceeds a certain limit, it is impossible to have children again.

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In addition to the objective limitation of age, same-sex marriage is the main reason why unmarried women want to use assisted reproductive technology to have children. Our current laws do not recognize same-sex marriage. There is no way for same-sex couples to have children.

"As a lesbian, I want to have a child with my lover, which is our common crystallization." an anonymous user wrote on Zhihu. At present, the mainstream method for lesbians to have a baby is for one person to provide the eggs and for the other to be impregnated. In this way, both people have an engraved connection with the baby.

What Lay Ahead

The current legal solution is to do it abroad. Due to various factors such as social structure and cultural traditions, the legal provisions on the implementation of assisted reproductive technology for single women are different in various countries. Some states in the United States, Russia, Thailand, etc., currently allow Assisted Reproduction Techniques for unmarried women. This contributes to the reason why a group of single women in China have children overseas.

"Going abroad for in vitro fertilization is one of my options as long as conditions allow. I think it would be nice to have a blonde child," said Ms. Wang.

In fact, giving unmarried women the right to implement assisted reproductive technology has been

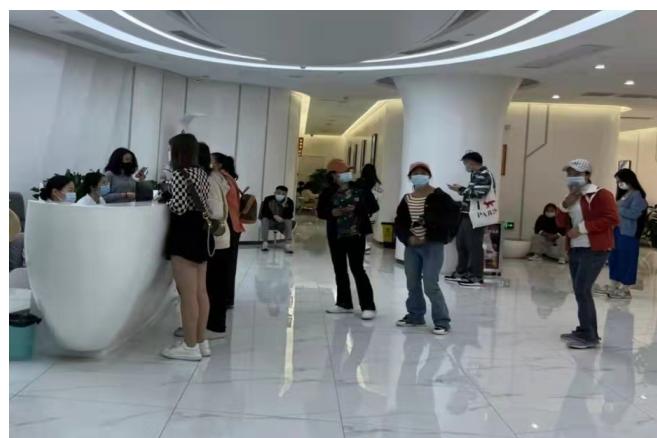
discussed in recent years. In particular, the issue of household registration for children born out of wedlock can gradually be resolved, and more and more single women who want to have a child are quietly entering this industry chain.

"I was unmarried for in vitro fertilization. Although the state does not allow it, those who have ideas and can afford it are already in action," a user named Smoky and Hazy Clouds on Zhihu said.

On March 5, 2022, Hua Yawei, a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, called the state at this year's two sessions to allow unmarried women over the age of 30 who haven't bear children to undergo assisted reproduction procedures such as artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization, which may make it possible for unmarried women to use assisted reproductive technology to give birth in China.

At presents, Ms. Wang is still actively screening medical institutions for her in vitro fertilization. She said, "Maybe I'll be lucky enough to wait until it's legal."

According to the requirements of the interviewee, Wang Fang is a pseudonym.



Many women anxiously await the test results on March 9, 2022 in a private hospital in Tianhe District, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, where unmarried women can do assisted reproduction.

Photo by Liu Qi