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Ethical implications of health and transgenerational risks in the offspring induced by Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART)

This paper discusses ethical implications of new evidence from research showing that Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART) alter the phenotype and increase disease risks in the offspring. In humans, ART induces premature vascular ageing, arterial hypertension, cardiac dysfunction and insulin resistance in apparently healthy children and adolescents. These disease risks will be summarized in the first part of the paper. The widespread use of ART and its emergence as an important risk factor for long-term health urgently asks for ethical reflection on how to deal with this newly discovered disease risks. The second part of the paper will thus focus on an ethical appraisal of ART: one major ethical concern is a conflict of interests between a couple's desire to bear their own, genetically-related children (principle of autonomy) and the interest of the offspring to be born healthy (principle of non-maleficence). As there is evidence that the alteration of the phenotype is linked to epigenetic changes, another ethical concern is the transgenerational transmission of ART-induced health risks which might have an impact on the offspring's own wish to have children (ethical implication for future generations). These concerns call for a frank and transparent ethical debate and a profound as well as careful public deliberation on how to cope with the newly discovered disease risks associated with ART.

Biography

Daniel Gregorowius completed his PhD in 2012 at the University of Zurich, Switzerland, with a thesis on the ethics of genetic engineering. He did Post-doctoral studies at the Ludwig Maximilians University, Munich, Germany, in the field of Plant Biotechnology. He did further Post-doctoral studies at the University of Zurich on the ethics of synthetic biology and human germline editing. He also worked for different foundations and did several reserach projects, leading to more than 10 scientific publications. He is now Leader of the Research Division of the Foundation Dialogue Ethics in Zurich and works on a project based on assisted reproductive technologies.

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