



## **The Romanian egg affair**

In the last few days, we have learned a lot about the involvement of Israeli physicians in Romanian women's Primary oocytes (egg- cells) trade scandal. Unfortunately, this affair is one of many scandals concerning egg-cells trade around the world. This Romanian affair reveals the misconduct of physicians and medical fertility centers in Israel that arrange the traveling abroad of Israeli women trying to purchase fertilized egg-cells and to have those eggs implanted in their ovaries. The women from whom egg-cells are taken are, in most cases, white and financially weak east-Europeans. Egg-cells are considered very popular commodities among the "fertility industry," pharmaceutical companies and research institutes that deal with such issues as cloning research and embryonic stem-cells research. Physicians in Israel and other places around the globe, who vow to follow the physician oath "shall not harm," execute invasive medical procedures, that have potentially dangerous side effects, on women fully anesthetized; thus putting them in great health risk.

In Romania, as in other places, egg-cells trade involves huge amounts of money, in an uncontrolled market in which there are consumers willing to pay lots of money, women-sellers who are willing to risk their health to get partial financial existence, alongside agents and medical system that earn huge profits from these procedures. We are greatly concerned with the global developing of this phenomenon of organ trade, including egg-cells trade; a phenomenon which represents many of the characteristics of the global economic system, that also includes commercializing and commoditification of the human body for the benefit of those who are financially fortunate.

In spite of attempts made by many countries around the world (among them Great-Britain, USA, Spain, Sweden and other countries) to put the issue of "egg-cells donations" under some sort of control and order by legislation, some of the citizens of these countries still turn to alternative paths of purchasing egg-cells and other organs abroad, while exploiting weak groups in various countries. This is one of the reasons that the European Union had formulated a position that firmly opposes giving financial compensation for donated egg-cells, and considers egg-cells donation as another kind of organ trade.

As a society, we should not allow the use of medical knowledge and technology, developed for helping and healing the ill, in a manner that endangers the health of women, not for the cause of saving lives, but for research or for trying to reach parenthood at any price. We oppose the efforts aiming at fulfilling fertility through exploiting the distress of other women, only because of the fact that there are those who can afford it and those who need the money. Sadly, we live in a reality full of various forms of modern slavery including trafficking in women, organ trade, exploiting immigrants, etc. As a society, we have to oppose all such phenomena in every possible way.

*Isha L' Isha* (woman to woman) organization began its struggle against egg-cells trade in 2007. We worked very hard to raise awareness and to establish dialogue among various groups in Israeli society that are related to this issue. Moreover, we invested great efforts in



the *Knesset* (The Israeli parliament) trying to add reforms and amendments to the egg-cells bill. Indeed, the reformed bill declares that the amount of egg-cells allocated to research should be limited, that the donors should be examined by a committee consisting of mental health experts and social workers besides medical experts, that the whole procedure should be under national supervision and that criminal liability would be imposed upon whoever acts against this law. This bill is much better one than the original one, but still it does not provide full protection to the egg-cells donors, and, furthermore, does not formulate a mechanism that supervises upon the whole procedure of egg-cell donation, and the various complications that might occur.

Even if the bill were to be approved, including all the reforms mentioned earlier, we are concerned that there would still be trade in egg-cells, and that some Israeli women who wish to get pregnant will be part of it, alongside women who will try to have their egg-cells sold. The optimal solution would include international collaboration, a higher level of severe punishment, finding non-exploiting economic solutions for those who turn to egg-cells trade following financial difficulties and raising public awareness of this phenomenon and of the efforts made to deal with it.

We believe that a public discussion can and should deal with complicated questions that have no simple, obvious answers: Is it ethical to risk the health of women while trying to have children? And if so, what does the social responsibility towards these women entail? Is there social legitimacy for various kinds of parenthood? Does our social system equally look after people from different economic statuses?

We encourage you to learn, in your countries, about the issues mentioned above, to act for eradicating phenomena like organ trade and human trafficking, and to support international awareness and actions against it.

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#### **About us:**

Isha L'Isha is a community-based, grassroots feminist organization located in Haifa. We offer women a safe, supportive environment in which they address their needs, providing room for self-expression and development. Isha L'Isha provides a platform to discuss issues of direct importance to women's lives and their communities, such as feminism and women's rights, violence against women, reproductive rights, discrimination in work and society, sexual identity, the economy, ecological and environmental issues, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and healthcare.