



In hard times, more U.S. women try to sell their eggs

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By Michelle Nichols and Angela Moore

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Drawn by payments of up to \$10,000, an increasing number of women are offering to sell their eggs at U.S. fertility clinics as a way to make money amid the financial crisis.

Nicole Hodges, a 23-year-old actress in New York City who has been out of work since November, says she has decided to sell her eggs because she desperately needs cash.

"I'm still paying off college. I have credit card bills and, you know, rent in New York is so expensive," Hodges, who has been accepted as donor and is waiting to be chosen by a couple, told Reuters Television.

Hodges said there was also some satisfaction in helping an infertile couple have a child. "Yes, the money is very nice, but it's nice to be able to let a mother who wants to be a mother be a mother," she said.

Fertility organizations across the country said there had been a growing interest. **The Center for Egg Options in Illinois has seen a 40 percent increase in egg donor inquiries since the start of 2008.**

New York City's Northeast Assisted Fertility Group said interest had doubled and the Colorado Center for Reproductive Medicine said it had received 10 percent more inquiries.

The Reproductive Science Center of New England, which does not deal directly with egg donors, said it had gone from no inquiries to now receiving several a month.

The American Society for Reproductive Medicine recommends that total payments to donors be capped at \$10,000.

A 2007 study by the society found the U.S. national average payment was \$4,216. Payments by clinics in the Northeast were found to average just over \$5,000, while those in the Northwest averaged just under \$3,000.

WAYS TO MAKE MONEY

Katherine Bernardo, egg donor program manager at Northeast Assisted Fertility Group, said while some women saw donation as an easy way to make money, not everyone was accepted.

"There is an economic climate that encourages women to find creative ways to make money," she said. "That doesn't mean that anyone interested in egg donation actually goes on to donate because so few women are actually eligible."

Bernardo said only 5 percent to 7 percent of the applications she received resulted in the retrieval of eggs. An ideal candidate, she said, was in her twenties, healthy, attractive and well-educated.

Egg donors undergo medical, psychological and genetic testing as well as a background check. If selected, a donor must undergo hormone injections until her eggs are ready to be retrieved.

"And remember the economy puts strain on the recipients too, Bernardo said. "It's a very expensive undertaking to use a donor egg and an IVF (in vitro fertilization) cycle."

Eric Surrey, medical director of the Colorado Center for Reproductive Medicine, said women should not donate their eggs simply for the money.

"We understand that financial compensation is certainly one motivation, but should never be the sole motivation. These women are providing a great gift to others that should not be taken lightly," said Surrey, a past president of the Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology.

Not as much money is on offer for men looking to donate sperm. Several sperm banks in New York City, where men are paid about \$60 each time they donate, said there had not been a rise in donors.

(Writing by Michele Nichols; Editing by David Storey).

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