

## Rise in Hong Kong women taking extra DNA test during fertility treatment

Mothers starting a family later in life are increasingly opting for embryo screening to avoid abnormalities, but critics raise religious and moral issues

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Fertility doctors have reported a growing trend for women marrying later in life to use controversial and expensive “test tube baby” technology to ensure a healthy pregnancy.

A private clinic said more women who used in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) were undertaking an additional DNA test of their embryos, screening out those with chromosomal abnormalities.

The procedure ensures only healthy ones are picked and transferred back into the mother’s body.

The use of **preimplantation genetic screening (PGS)**, which costs around HK\$40,000, has raised religious and moral concerns around the world.

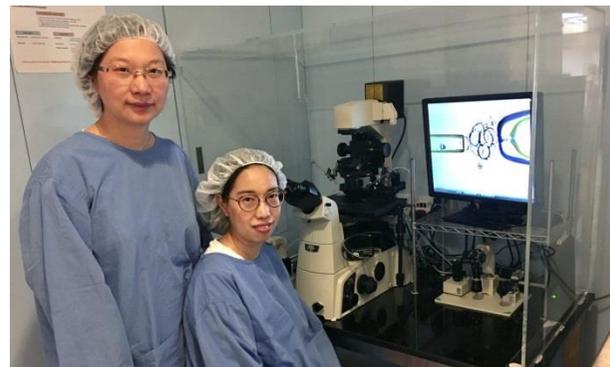
But local doctors said it reduced the likelihood of women who were aged 35 or above suffering a miscarriage.

“The screening can help to boost the successful rate of pregnancy and increase the chance of giving birth to healthy babies,” gynaecologist Dr

Wong Wai-ye said. Wong said the number of women at her private clinic seeking help through IVF was rising by 10 per cent a year.

According to data from the Council on Human Reproductive Technology, the number of Hong Kong women paying over HK\$100,000 for IVF to get pregnant was rising in step with their age. In 2009 a total of 1,783 used IVF to get pregnant. Of these, 35.4 per cent were aged 35 or above, while 29 per cent were 31 to 34.

Wong’s colleague Dr Lam Po-mui said women produced fewer healthy eggs as they aged. At the age of 37, only around three in 10 eggs are healthy, falling to one in 10 by the age of 40, Lam



said, citing several overseas studies.

This was one factor behind the 18.5 per cent rise in miscarriages between 2008 and 2014, to a total of 3,396 cases, according to the Hospital Authority.

Wong cited a Spanish study this year which suggested the PGS technology helped to minimise the miscarriage rate in IVF cases from 39 per cent to 2.7 per cent.

Wong and Lam’s clinic began offering the PGS treatment last year and has conducted it on around 20 local women, most of whom were aged 35 or above. But even with the help of technology, both warned women about the risk of having babies at an older age.

“More women are coming to us every year wanting to become mothers, but these cases are getting more and more difficult to treat due to their age,” Lam said. “For those who come to us after 43 years old, we can only try our best. There is no guarantee of a happy ending even with IVF.”