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ADVENT OF THE VIRGIN BIRTHS

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Women never
in a relationship
paying £5,000
to get pregnant

DOZENS of young heterosexual women have had virgin births after undergoing IVF in Britain, The Mail on Sunday can reveal.

Some are using the £5,000 fertility treatment to bypass the need to involve a man, and others so that they can save themselves for a 'special relationship'.

Doctors said last night at least 25 straight women had given birth in the past five years despite being virgins. But campaigners for the

By **Rachel Ellis**
and **Stephen Adams**

traditional family said the 'distorted' move turned babies into little more than 'teddy bears' to be 'picked off the shelf'.

Religious groups said it undermined the importance of bringing up children in a stable marriage,

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IVF clinics cross astonishing new frontier...

BRITAIN'S

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while a leading psychotherapist warned that having a mother who had never been in a relationship could harm a child's development.

At least four major British IVF firms have helped heterosexual, virginal women conceive and become mothers, The Mail on Sunday has found.

One is Care Fertility, which runs five centres across England. Maha Ragnath, medical director of its clinic in Nottingham, said: 'The number of single women I see has doubled over the last decade and single women now account for at least ten per cent of my patients.'

'A lot of them are very young, in their 20s, sometimes studying or doing very ordinary jobs and often living with their parents, rather than career women who have been driven and focused too much on their work. When I ask

Never had sex. No need for a man. Unbelievable but true – IVF clinics reveal a new trend in motherhood

them why they are coming for treatment, very often the response is that they are ready to have a child and they don't want to wait around for the right partner to come along.

'A small percentage have never been in a relationship and never had sexual intercourse.'

'They are extremely happy to go ahead on their own and don't care about the implications that might bring for the child or how they would go into a new relationship.'

Over the past three years, Miss Ragnath has treated three such single virgin women: one a nurse, another living at home with her parents, and a third who needed multiple rounds of IVF. All became mothers.

Heterosexual virgins will have paid for their own treatment, as NHS rules state women must 'have been trying to get pregnant through regular unprotected sexual intercourse' for two years before applying. But the development has angered many. Josephine Quintav-

alle, of the group Comment on Reproductive Ethics, said: 'What is the child for these women? A teddy bear that they pick off the shelf?'

'The message from nature is for a male and female to have a child, and I am saddened that we are willing to

'They don't want to wait for the right partner'

distort this. The diminished role of the father is not desirable for the child. Once you start down this route, where do you stop?'

But Laura Witjens, chief executive of the National Gamete Donation Trust, said: 'These women have a right to choose this path if they want to, but clinics do have a responsibility to consider why they want to do so.' She said society tended to 'freak out when they heard about single

women going for motherhood. But she said such women tended to be much better prepared financially, socially and emotionally, to be parents than those left as single mothers through a failed relationship.'

However, the Bishop of Carlisle, James Newcome, said any trend towards young women deciding they did not need a family to have a child would 'have implications for society that would not be helpful'.

'The ideal is that a child has a mother and a father who are married to each other. All the evidence shows that is the best context for a child,' he said.

The revelation comes days after Pope Francis warned the family was threatened 'perhaps as never before', telling US Congress: 'Fundamental relationships are being called into question, as is the very basis of marriage and the family.'

Imam Suhaib Hasan, head of Britain's Islamic Sharia Council, accused IVF doctors of 'acting like

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VIRGIN MUMS



PLAYING GOD?
Maha Ragnath helped three virgin births at the Care Fertility clinic, left

God'. He said: 'When you remove a man from this, a woman becomes nothing but a breeding machine. Here, a woman is denying the child the right to have a father.'

Other IVF firms helping heterosexual virgin women to conceive include The London Women's Clinic, Create Fertility, and the Assisted Reproduction and Gynaecology Centre. Tracey Sainsbury, a senior fertility counsellor and research officer at The London Women's

Clinic, said she saw about two single, heterosexual virgin women a year wanting to have a baby.

'Every case is different,' she explained. 'Some have never had a relationship, others have been in a relationship but never had sexual intercourse, some are single lesbian women; for others there may be psychological or medical reasons why they have never had sex.'

'Some wish to save sexual intercourse for a special relationship.

They feel they have not found the right partner to share sex with, but they know they want a baby now.

'If they haven't found that relationship by the point at which they want a baby, then I don't see fertility treatment as an issue.'

'The same is true for single lesbians. I have not met a single woman hoping to conceive who has popped in to the clinic on a whim, or who hasn't thought about the implications of their decisions for them-

selves, their wider family and most importantly for any child conceived. There is no uncertainty about their desire to parent.'

Professor Geeta Nargund, of Create Fertility, and Mohamed Taranissi, of the ARGC, said they too had helped virgin heterosexuals conceive, but they tended to be women with issues about sex who were in relationships.

'This tends to be as a result of a physical or psycho-physical problem, although cultural and religious influences may sometimes be a factor,' explained Prof Nargund, who said her clinic had seen about a dozen such couples since 2010.

'In some cultures it is the stigma associated with childlessness which causes some women to head for fertility treatment rather than counselling for psychosexual issues.'

Dr Taranissi added: 'It's fear of sex. Most of them don't have a fertility issue - it's more a psychological problem.'

Child psychotherapist Dilys Daws said the fact that virgin women were resorting to IVF 'suggests someone who is not emotionally mature enough to be close to someone else - and that matters when it comes to bringing up a child. It implies the woman has a fear of having a close physical relationship with someone else, in which case the baby will not be brought up with that love.'

Clinics stress that every woman must see a counsellor before treatment so they understand the process and the implications of using donor sperm. Children born this way have the right to trace their biological father once they reach 18. Clinics also say great importance is placed on the welfare of child.

But Gedis Grudzinskas, an experienced Harley Street infertility consultant, said it was essential doctors

'For many women, it's because of a fear of sex'

assessed 'the circumstances into which a child would be born' before agreeing to help a single, virginal woman get pregnant. 'Just because money talks does not mean it's the right thing to do,' he said.

The treatment involves donor sperm fertilising the eggs of single women, either being introduced through the vagina - a process called intrauterine insemination, or in the lab with in vitro fertilisation. Most choose the latter as success rates with IVF are double that with IUI.

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... and miracle babies for wounded soldiers who lost hope of fatherhood

By **Mark Nicol** and **Andy Gardner**

FIVE British soldiers whose reproductive organs were destroyed when they stepped on Taliban landmines in Afghanistan have become fathers thanks to a revolutionary medical procedure pioneered by UK scientists.

The operation involves recovering sperm from a casualty within 48 hours of them being wounded on the battlefield.

The technique, which is only available in Britain, was developed by Dr Jackson Kirkman-Brown and his colleagues at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham.

He said: 'Back in 2010 we started seeing more members of the Armed Forces surviving incidents when previously they would have died.'

'However, some of their wounds to the genital area were severe and affected their fertility, so our team invented an operation which we could carry out a few days after the injury.'

'There is a window of opportunity of 24 to 48 hours to find healthy sperm that existed prior to injury, in a tube called the vas deferens. It is protected



HONOUR:
The Queen presents Shaun with the Afghan Campaign Medal in 2010

deep within the body and is usually OK even if the soldier has extensive blast injuries.'

Previously, soldiers who had lost their testicles in bomb blasts were unable to conceive children unless they had frozen sperm before going to war.

Private Shaun Stocker, from Wrexham, North Wales, was 19 when he was severely wounded after treading on an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) in Helmand province in April 2010. He is expecting to become father to a boy on Christmas Day.

Shaun, from Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, the Royal Welsh Regiment, was blinded and lost

his legs in the blast. He also spent two months in an induced coma.

Shaun, now 25, said: 'There was nothing where my testicles were supposed to be. I was single then and I doubted any woman would want to be with me.'

'Not having any sperm in a sperm bank, I figured my chances of having children had gone. But then Dr Kirkman-Brown told me that while I'd been in the coma he had operated on me, found some sperm and frozen it. It gave me hope.'

Shaun then began a long recovery battle, spending several months at Headley Court, the Army's rehabilitation centre for

wounded personnel in Surrey. He was later honoured by the Queen for his service in Afghanistan.

He met his fiancée Persia Haghghi, 24, from Chester, through mutual friends and proposed in September 2014. Persia said: 'The following month we went to Birmingham to speak to Dr Kirkman-Brown and arrange for me to begin IVF treatment. In April we found out I was pregnant.'

'It was simply a joyous moment, in particular for Shaun who has gone through so much.'

As a token of their appreciation towards Dr Kirkman-Brown, Shaun and Persia will give their son the middle name Jackson.

The MoD said: 'Sperm salvage is now a core part of our initial combat trauma care. This approach helps casualties cope with their injuries and gives them hope. A number of children have been born as a result and more are on the way.'

● *In March, Shaun plans to walk 60 miles across North Wales on behalf of Blind Veterans UK. He has started a fundraising page on the Just Giving website.*



LES WILSON

JOY: Shaun and fiancée Persia, who are expecting a son on Christmas Day