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UNCLAIMED FROZEN EMBRYOS: THEORETICAL ETHICAL ANALYSIS

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Relevance. Unclaimed frozen embryos are potential beings, abandoned in cryopreservation with no future. This is not a problem for those abandoned, but for those who must decide. This issue is a worldwide problem with no definite solution.

Aim: the aim of this article is to define and discuss the ethical and moral issues that arise from the disposition of these unclaimed embryos.

Materials and methods. This study is a theoretical ethical analysis based on a review of existing scientific literature, legal documents, and ethical guidelines concerning the status and disposition of unclaimed frozen embryos. The research did not involve experimental procedures, clinical trials, or direct interaction with human subjects.

Results and their discussion. Frozen Embryos are a result of technological advancement, and so a proper and justifiable solution must be discovered. There are 4 possible outcomes for these frozen embryos: to store indefinitely, to dispose of thawing (or through a compassionate transfer), to donate to scientific research or donate to other couples. Although these are all viable options, none of them provide an ideal solution. These choices violate the principles of medical ethics; they bring about harm, refuse autonomy, and not all can be treated equally. Those with responsibility to decide are the parents, and the choice made depends on each person. Is it okay for parents to make this decision? How would this mentally affect them? Should the embryo be treated as 'property' or as a future individual? Should the embryo have a right? Are we respecting their dignity? Here, do the benefits outweigh the consequences? Should the parents be allowed to abandon their embryos? Is it alright for them to remain indecisive? None of the choices available are beneficial to the embryos, nor is it ethical to discard them nor keep them forever.

Conclusions. The situation is still complicated. No definite solutions are out, but people are trying to solve the problem. Some clinics now require advance directives signed by patients prior to IVF. But the problem at hand must be reduced: a limit to the number of embryos fertilized should be placed, more strict laws enforced and in vitro fertilization should only be a last resort. The embryo's existence should not be undermined, if they are not needed, they should not be created. Finally, for the currently abandoned embryos a swift response is needed and a decision must be taken. The status of an embryo has to be finalized. The legal and moral status of the embryo should be defined as a transitional biological entity with the potential for human life, distinct from both a child and mere property or tissue.