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O-213 Experiences of Australian egg donors (EDs) who have early contact (before 18) with their donor conceived children (DCC) and recipient parents (RPs): implications for counselling
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Study question: How do Australian EDs, known and previously unknown, experience early contact with their DCC and/or RPs? (Early contact is when DCC are under 18 years).

Summary answer: Altruistic Australian EDs formed meaningful, ongoing relationships with their RPs and DCC. For participants, early contact was central to how they enacted egg donation.

What is known already: In Australia the dominant view is that DCC have the right to know the identity of their EDs, at least after the donor conceived person reaches the age of 18 and in some cases before the age of 18. The practice of early contact between EDs and their DCC is on the increase, particularly in a context where EDs liaise directly with their RPs and request that early contact occurs. There is a gap in the literature around how Australian EDs experience early contact and the significance that early contact plays in their self-identity as EDs.

Study design, size, duration: Over six months in 2020, a convenience sample of 29 altruistic Australian egg donors was recruited. Study participants had early contact with at least one DCC and agreed to participate in an hour long semi-structured interview about their motivation for donating and experience of early contact with their DCC and RPs. Interviews were conducted via telephone, as face-to-face interviews were not permitted due to Covid-19 restrictions in Melbourne, Australia. Narrative and thematic analysis was conducted.

Participants/materials, setting, methods: Six EDs were known, twenty-three were previously unknown to their RPs. Three volunteered via a fertility clinic, twenty were introduced to their RPs via an online platform. The number of DCC that an individual ED had varied: 1-3 (13); 4-7 (6); and 8 or more (10). All had early contact with at least one, most had contact with all their DCC. A subgroup (10) saw themselves as head of a network of several RP families.
Main results and the role of chance: Early contact was a significant aspect in the egg donation process for most study participants. EDs negotiated with their RPs to have early contact with their DCC and to facilitate future interactions if their DCC wanted information about their genetic background. Most were emotionally invested in the outcome of their egg donation, including during their RPs’ pregnancy and delivery. Most developed ongoing relationships with their recipient families. While they wanted contact, EDs were careful not to threaten the parental role of their RPs. EDs in Australia described positive experience of early contact. The relationships that they formed through early contact had a positive impact on their self-identity as EDs and contributed to some becoming highly motivated EDs (undergoing eight or more ED cycles). Highly motivated EDs underplayed possible consequences of donating, in part due to the positive experience of early contact. A few EDs were disappointed when a few RPs broke off contact, especially as they had little recourse to affect a change. Prospective Australian EDs and RPs should be counselled around the practice of early contact, which can be ongoing. The experience of Australian EDs may have relevance for other contexts were early contact is being considered.

Limitations, reasons for caution: The study was a cross-sectional analysis of Australian EDs who had early contact with their DCC. Interviews were conducted when the DCC were relatively young (average age 3 yrs) and did not include longitudinal follow-up. None of the study participants had chosen not to have early contact with their DCC.

Wider implications of the findings: Prospective Australian EDs and RPs need to be counselled around the practice of early contact. Counselling should include discussion around the expectations of early contact, how it is experienced and that for some, contact may be ongoing.

Trial registration number: N/A