

## **Building Families through Donor Sperm:**

### **Male Infertility, Social Support, and Telling Children about Their Origins**

In Taiwan, many families have been formed through donated sperm and eggs, yet little attention has been paid to the experiences and types of support needed during the process of family formation via this route. At the same time, the disclosure of a child's origins in third-party reproduction has become a key children's rights issue internationally, calling for the sharing of practical approaches. Families built through diverse paths require support on multiple levels to develop in a stable and healthy way.

In March 2025, the NTU Resilient Society Research Center invited Ryusei Terayama and his wife—the founders and representatives of Japan's AID Parties Support Association—to give a talk in Taiwan. This initiative aimed to learn from the actions and development of Japanese civil society groups on this issue. AID stands for Artificial Insemination by Donor, a reproductive technology using donor sperm.

Over the past 20 years, Japan has actively advocated for proper disclosure of origins to children born through AID and other third-party reproductive technologies.

Historically, Japan has practiced anonymous gamete donation, and most parents did not inform their children of their origins. For example, a 2000 survey conducted at a Japanese hospital found that 81% of parents did not want their children to know they were born via donor sperm, with only 1% expressing willingness to disclose.

However, since 2000, some donor-conceived individuals who discovered the truth as adults have publicly shared their feelings of betrayal and pain from being deceived by their parents, which garnered widespread public attention. Public opinion gradually shifted toward prioritizing the rights of the child, prompting civil organizations, medical institutions, and activists to place greater importance on origin disclosure.

In this wave of reform, Ryusei Terayama established a support group to assist families with infertility in navigating origin disclosure. Terayama himself is azoospermic. After undergoing multiple unsuccessful fertility treatments in Japan, he and his wife came to Taiwan in 2018 to use donor sperm and now have two daughters. Having personally experienced the complexity and emotional struggles of disclosing their

children's origins, the Terayamas founded their support association in 2022 to provide emotional and informational support for parents and children with similar experiences.

There are still many challenges for parents in disclosing a child's origins. In their talk, the Terayamas shared practical approaches in vivid detail. The AID Parties Support Association frequently holds gatherings to help parents discuss methods for origin disclosure. This kind of group support helps parents build the courage to be open, while also allowing donor-conceived children to meet peers with similar backgrounds, reinforcing that their stories are not unique. When these children grow up and face questions about their origins, they will have peers to talk to.

Mr. Terayama advocates that men with azoospermia should first come to terms with their condition before proceeding with AID. He emphasizes that male infertility is not a tragedy and that acceptance, honest communication with one's partner, and reaching consensus on how to build a family are crucial. In this process, interacting with experienced parents can clarify uncertainties and ease emotional distress. This foundation allows parents to confidently disclose their child's origins in the future.

The Terayamas introduced several practical strategies for origin disclosure. They recommend beginning disclosure when the child is still very young, ideally shortly after birth. In their case, they began practicing how to tell the story even before their daughters were born, while still in the womb. They stress that disclosure doesn't require a formal, solemn occasion—it can happen in everyday life and even be a joyful process. The core of disclosure is expressing the parents' happiness and gratitude for the child's birth. Children should also understand that lack of genetic ties is not a negative thing.

In one humorous family anecdote shared by Mr. Terayama, he mentioned being allergic to strawberries, whereas his daughter loves them. One day, while happily eating strawberries, the daughter exclaimed, "Good thing I wasn't born from Daddy's sperm!" This lighthearted moment turned the absence of genetic ties into a positive experience, driven by the child's own creativity. After the birth of their second daughter, the elder sister even took it upon herself to explain their father's situation to the baby in the cradle—showing that open communication had become a natural part

of the family environment.

In Japan, some picture books have been developed specifically for origin disclosure, which can be used as helpful tools. Mr. Terayama and several reproductive counseling specialists also work with medical institutions to share their experiences with prospective parents before they begin fertility treatment, helping families who will use donor sperm better understand the journey ahead.

Thanks to civil society initiatives, reform advocates, and involvement from reproductive counselors, origin disclosure is becoming a more accepted and feasible practice in Japan. A recent survey conducted by a Japanese fertility clinic found that among over 100 families using donor sperm, 95% of parents expressed willingness to disclose their child's origins. This marks a major shift from just 1% in 2000, highlighting the powerful impact of collaborative efforts.

The Terayamas also point out that simply telling children they were born through AID may not be enough to address their evolving identity needs. As children grow older, they may want to know more about the donor—such as why he donated, his hobbies, favorite subjects, or sports interests. Thus, under the premise of protecting donor privacy, regulatory frameworks that allow limited access to certain background information could help parents in the disclosure process and safeguard the personality rights of donor-conceived individuals. Since the Terayamas conceived their children in Taiwan, the Japanese movement for origin disclosure also relies on complementary legal frameworks in countries like Taiwan. As cross-border use of reproductive technologies becomes increasingly common, there is a growing need to think globally about regulatory reform.

Taiwan is currently engaged in heated discussions about revising its Assisted Reproduction Act, but there has been little attention to the issue of donor anonymity. The law, enacted in 2007, upholds anonymous donation, allowing medical institutions to provide only race, skin color, and blood type of the donor to the recipient couple. Internationally, more countries have established new legal frameworks that uphold the right of donor-conceived children to know their origins, allowing them to access more information upon reaching adulthood. Balancing the child's right to know with the donor's right to privacy requires broader social discussion.

Even if anonymous donation remains the norm for now, families can still disclose their child's origins. In Taiwan, many families are formed through gamete donation. Aside from advocacy and experience-sharing efforts led by groups like the Taiwan LGBT Family Rights Advocacy, most heterosexual families lack similar organizations or resources. The experience of Japanese civil society groups offers valuable lessons for Taiwan and could inspire more initiatives to support these families.

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