

Funded by a Morrell Trust grant, administered by the University of York, this pilot project examined black people's experiences of fertility care. Focusing on black people living in the UK, I aimed to recruit black fertility care users, fertility professionals and black egg and sperm donors in order to better understand how the fertility sector (and the people in it) responds to the desire to reproduce blackness.

The study was conducted between January and June 2025. I conducted interviews with 11 fertility care users, all of whom self-identified as black women, 7 fertility professionals including doctors, nurses and counsellors, and 1 black sperm donor. After DCN distributed the call for participants, six people contacted me and disclosed that they had heard about the project through DCN although not all six were interviewed.

In the table below, I have summarised some basic demographic information about the fertility care users:

Pseudonym	Age	Country of birth	ART used	Relationship status	Annual household income	Highest degree achieved
Adele	40-45	UK	Not yet accessed fertility care	In a relationship	£35,001-50,000	Postgraduate degree
Bugewa	40-45	UK	IVF, pursuing gestational surrogacy	Married	£35,001-50,000	Undergraduate degree or professional qualification
Carol	30-39	Nigeria	IVF	Married	£50,001-75,000	Postgraduate degree
Emilia	30-39	Zimbabwe	Gestational surrogacy, IVF	Married	£75,000+	Postgraduate degree
Florence	40-45	UK	IVF, considering egg donation	Married	£35,001-50,000	Postgraduate degree
Ijeoma	40-45	USA	Egg donation, IVF	In a relationship	£50,001-75,000	Postgraduate degree
Jacinta	30-39	Nigeria	IVF	In a relationship	£50,001-75,000	Postgraduate degree
Laura	46-50	UK	Sperm donation, IVF	Single	£35,001-50,000	Postgraduate degree
Nyovani	46-50	Zambia	Egg and sperm	In a relationship	£75,000+	Postgraduate degree

			donation, IVF			
Olivette	40-45	UK	Sperm donation, IVF	Single	£35,001-50,000	Postgraduate degree
Phoebe	46-50	UK	Sperm donation, IUI, Embryo donation, IVF	Single	£50,001-75,000	Undergraduate degree or professional qualification

Data analysis is still underway but early findings suggest:

- the ‘shortage’ of black egg and sperm donors leads fertility care users to compromise by, for example, i) choosing a ‘Mediterranean’ donor who they believe (and are told by professionals) might be able to approximate blackness, ii) travelling abroad to countries with more options including Spain and Nigeria
- black fertility care users would appreciate bespoke support that acknowledges cultural differences and expectations
- for many black fertility care users, NHS fertility treatment is marked by delays, a lack of empathy and in some cases, racist incidents
- the meaning of blackness is complex and variable, marked by cultural identity (distinguishing between Jamaican and Kenyan blackness, for example) and differences in racial literacy (such as uncertainty about whether skin tone descriptions by staff were ‘accurate’)
- racial matching is assumed but not treated in the same way by all parties to fertility treatment (for example, one participant reported being described as ‘fussy’ for desiring a Jamaican sperm donor)

Future plans for the research

This was a pilot study, collecting initial reflections and impressions of what it means to reproduce blackness using reproductive technologies. Drawing from this data, I am working on a grant application to expand data collection and develop resources that will improve support for black people accessing fertility care. I hope to work with DCN in the future as this project continues.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to DCN and the many other organisations and individuals who supported this pilot study. My especial thanks go to the women who shared their experiences with me. Thank you.

Researcher: Patricia Hamilton, University of York
13 August 2025