

Surrogacy in Pakistan

March 11, 2017

THIS refers to the article ‘Surrogacy procedure not available at home despite demand’ (Feb 23). It has ignored the recent ethical debate on surrogacy around the globe.

The title of the article reduces the phenomenon of surrogacy to a question of supply and demand. Published following the Federal Shariat Court’s judgment (that decisively closes the door on surrogacy in Pakistan), the article states that the consensus of experts involved in IVF is that “despite a good demand for surrogacy in the country, experts do not offer this option as a solution for infertility.”

As I read it, this statement seems to imply that though there is a market for surrogacy in Pakistan, experts are unable to help childless couples because of the existing laws.

Certainly, the benefit to childless couples is one of the arguments that can be put forward in support of altruistic surrogacy.

However, the article neglects the dark side of commercial surrogacy which is largely based on the exploitation of poor women who rent out their wombs for monetary recompense — much as poor kidney vendors sell their kidneys to pay debts and marry off younger siblings.

The article touches upon the ‘big business’ of surrogacy in India, but does not discuss the experience of surrogacy in India and Thailand, which had become hubs for surrogacy tourism.

Thailand ultimately enacted laws forbidding commercial surrogacy in 2015, while a bill that seeks to end commercial surrogacy was introduced in the Indian parliament in November 2016.

Anika Khan

Centre of Biomedical Ethics and Culture, SIUT Karachi

Published in Dawn, March 11th, 2017