



## **Media Release**

### **Surprising Results from Survey on Public Attitudes to Bioethical Issues**

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**For Immediate Release**

In August 2005, the Irish Council for Bioethics Commissioned TNS mrbi to undertake a survey on public attitudes to bioethical issues. The results proved interesting and in some cases, surprising.

The key findings of the survey include the following:

#### **IVF Treatment and Stem Cell Research**

57% of Irish adults aged 18+ years believe that life begins at conception.

44% believe that surplus embryos left over after IVF treatment should be used in medical research, with 4 in 5 of these, still agreed when told that using surplus embryos would lead to their destruction.

Over one third of Irish adults believe that scientists should be allowed to create embryos specifically for use in research.

54% said they would use new treatments for disease developed using embryonic stem cell research and 54% believe that the Irish Government should fund embryonic stem cell research.

#### **Organ Donation**

81% of respondents agree that living related donation should be promoted in Ireland. Almost two thirds of adults believe that paying people to donate their organs is morally wrong.

#### **Prolonging the Lives of Severely Premature Babies**

44% of respondents said that the lives of premature babies should be prolonged even where there is a risk that the child will have a very poor quality of life.

#### **Use of DNA in Solving Crime**

87% of respondents feel that people who have been convicted of a serious crime should have their DNA profile retained on a Garda database indefinitely. Three quarters of Irish adults cited that only suspects of serious crime (rape, murder) should have their DNA profiles stored. 37% of respondents thought that anyone questioned by Gardaí should have their DNA stored on a forensic database.

#### **Genetics**

Irish people are split on genetic screening. 42% of respondents believe that unborn children should be screened for genetic disorders (down's Syndrome) with a view to deciding whether or not to continue a pregnancy, while 43% disagreed.

43% of people surveyed agreed that the law in Ireland should be changed to allow parents to select embryos during IVF on the basis of whether the embryo has a life threatening/non-life threatening disorder.

### **Biobanking**

Half of people surveyed claimed they would be willing to have their biological material stored in a national non-profit biobank, while only 21% said they would be willing to have their biological material stored in a commercial biobank. 61% of those who said they would allow their biological material to be stored in a national non-profit biobank said they would have concerns regarding confidentiality.

### **Patenting**

Half of Irish adults aged 18 or over agreed that the use of patents makes medicines prohibitively expensive and therefore harms public interest.

### **Caring for the Elderly**

67% of respondents felt that expensive treatments should **not** be withdrawn from older people, even if doctors feel the chances of success are low.

### **End of Life Issues**

59% of people surveyed believe that advance directives (a set of written instructions outlining how someone wants their future medical decisions to be made, in the event that they become incapable of making/communicating those decisions) should be legally binding and take precedence over the wishes of next-of-kin and doctors' advice.

40% of respondents believe that Euthanasia should be legal in Ireland. While one quarter believe that Assisted suicide should be legal in Ireland.

### **Speed of Progress: Science vs. Ethics and Law**

Almost half of Irish adults agree that science needs to slow down its progress and allow ethics and law to catch up.

### **Methodology**

The survey consisted of a nationally representative face to face interview of 500 adults, 18+ years with a 4.5% margin of error. The survey sample was quota controlled in terms of gender and age within area. In addition, overall socio-economic controls were also applied.

The Irish Council for Bioethics was established in 2002 as an independent, autonomous body to consider the ethical issues raised by recent developments in science and medicine.

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