

Growing assisted reproduction industry raises questions about unused embryos

In storage facilities across the nation, hundreds of thousands of frozen embryos — perhaps a million — are preserved in silver tanks of liquid nitrogen. Some are in storage for [cancer](#) patients trying to preserve their chance to have a family after [chemotherapy](#) destroys their fertility. But most are leftovers from the booming assisted reproduction industry, belonging to couples who could not conceive naturally.

And increasingly families, clinics and the courts are facing difficult choices on what to do with them — decisions that involve profound questions about the beginning of life, the definition of family and the technological advances that have opened new reproductive possibilities.

The embryos with the greatest chance of developing into a healthy baby are used first, and the excess are frozen; a 2002 survey found about 400,000 frozen embryos, and another in 2011 estimated 612,000. Now, many reproductive endocrinologists say, the total may be about a million.

Couples are generally glad to have the leftover embryos, backups in case a [pregnancy](#) does not result from the first tries.

“But if I ask what they’ll do with them, they often have a Scarlett O’Hara response: I’ll think about that tomorrow,” said Dr. Mark V. Sauer, of Columbia University’s Center for Women’s Reproductive Care. “Couples don’t always agree about the moral and legal status of the embryo, where life begins, and how religion enters into it, and a lot of them end up kicking the can down the road.”

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: [Industry’s Growth Leads to Leftover Embryos, and Painful Choices](#)