What is already known on this topic

Many randomised controlled trials fail to recruit their target number of participants, which has implications for the validity of their findings

Privately funded research often provides financial incentives to increase patient recruitment, but this is less common in publicly funded research

What this study adds

Evidence on the effectiveness of payment to healthcare professionals for recruiting patients to trials is lacking; funding bodies must consider whether to extrapolate from the evidence of effectiveness of financial incentives in other areas or to undertake new work

informed consent procedures and for the doctor-patient relationship. Secondly, it would be easy to randomise the payment of incentives in a multicentre RCT. Thirdly, there are considerable resource implications associated with research participation. Rigorous evidence from well conducted studies is needed to

inform recruitment strategies before publicly funded research programmes can consider the use of financial incentives.

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When I use a word

Incestuous sheets

It has been said that there is only one taboo about incest—mentioning it. There are no exact synonyms for incest, no euphemisms, no slang terms.

Nevertheless, incest is mentioned widely in art and literature, from the Bible, through the many brother-sister relationships in mythology, to the latest example, Audrey Niffenegger's graphic novel *The Three Incestuous Sisters*. In the movies, perhaps the best known example is Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*, in which Jake Gittes (Jack Nicholson), by slapping her again and again, jolts Evelyn Mulwray (Faye Dunaway) into admitting her guilty secret about Katherine (Belinda Palmer): "She's my sister ... my daughter ... my sister ... my daughter ... my sister and my daughter." Can so much guilt ever have been borne by that little particle "and"? But did Polanski know, when he (or his screenwriter, Robert Towne) called Mrs Mulwray's daughter Katherine, that the Greek word *katharos*, pure, is related to incest?

Consider the Indo-European root *KASTR*, to cut. A Roman camp, *castra*, was a place where the ground had been cut clear, and a castle (*castella*, *château*, *alcazar*) had a moat cut around it. A caret is a sign below the line to show that something has been cut out. The Latin *castus* meant cut free of fault, or pure. A caste is a group of pure individuals, cut off from others. To castigate is to drive (Latin *agere*) into purity, hence to punish. The *cestus* was Venus's girdle, which kept the wearer pure until it was removed. The Greek equivalent was the *zoster*, the source of Aphrodite's eroticism. When Herakles was sent on his mission to obtain the girdle of the Amazon queen Hippolyta, he was actually being instructed to deflower her, which he did. When Siegfried seduces his half-aunt Brunnhilde he first tears off her magic girdle.

But the modern meaning of incest developed quite late. There was no single word for incest in ancient Greek or Latin. The

Greeks called it *anosos sunousia* (unholy intercourse), the Romans *sanguis contumelia* (translated into German as *Blutschande*, blood dishonour). And the Latin word *incestus* originally meant simply impure in a religious or sexual sense, not necessarily incestuous. The earliest recorded example in English is from as late as the 13th century.

Although there seems to be no culture in which some form of incest is not taboo, what actually constitutes incest varies from culture to culture. Strict laws enunciated in the Old Testament (Leviticus 18:6-18 and elsewhere) prohibited various forms of incest (called *arayot* in the Talmud), but the text is strewn with exceptions; Sarah, for example, was Abraham's half-sister (Genesis 20:12). However, elsewhere the Old Testament also specifically sanctioned, indeed mandated, is the *levirate* (Latin *levir* = brother-in-law), the custom that a man should marry his brother's childless widow (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). Yet four times in the play *Hamlet* calls Claudius incestuous for marrying his dead brother's wife. And when Henry VIII decided to annul his marriage to Katherine of Aragon, he blamed her inability to produce a male heir on their incestuous relationship, she having been the widow of his brother, Arthur.

In some cultures father-daughter incest accounts for the vast majority of cases, while in others the brother-sister relationship is rife and sometimes encouraged. Despite Oedipus, the mother-son coupling is relatively uncommon (4% in one German series). According to Freud, the oedipal urge is associated with a castration complex. The Greek god Kronos castrated his father, Uranos, before inseminating his sister Rhea, thus incestuously sowing the seeds of his own destruction. And what links castration and incest is the Indo-European root *KASTR*.

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