

PETITION CURRENTLY BEING
CIRCULATED BY THE BRITISH
PREGNANCY ADVISORY SERVICE

Why sex selection should not be embedded in the Serious Crime Bill

Dear Mr. Cameron,

We are deeply concerned about the proposed amendment currently being introduced to allegedly clarify existing abortion law in the UK. **The amendment seeks to make sex selection a criminal offence** 1. and explicitly targets South Asian women because of widely acknowledged cultural attitudes which prefer sons. However, the current proposal is not the means by which to address the issue of sex selection due to the following concerns:

1. The evidence that has been presented in Fiona Bruce's statement is anecdotal in nature, and the Department of Health and **other academic studies have failed to find any statistically significant evidence to show sex ratios indicating that sex selective abortions are being practiced** 2. to warrant such a move.

2. By embedding the Abortion (Sex Selection) Bill into Part 5 of the Government's Serious Crime Bill as statute, **it seeks to criminalise abortion more fundamentally** 3. by positing the fetus at the centre of any potential criminal cases. Women need support and if there is coercion involved in any such cases of sex selective abortions, **the existing Abortion Act sufficiently covers this area** 4. and requires strengthening with the support of social services.

3. In relation to the above, the closure of so many Asian women's organisations and specialist services has meant that the vital support needed to strengthen women and help them resist the pressure to produce sons is no longer available. This needs to be remedied.

4. **Doctors and service providers would be under further pressure to screen and use methods of ethnic profiling** 5. when reviewing requests for abortions which is problematic on many grounds.

In our view, **the pro-life lobby is using this as an opportunity** 6. to fracture the pro-choice lobby (which, we emphasise is *not* pro-abortion, but pro-choice).

Those signed here are entirely against sex selection and gender discrimination of all forms. However, the **proposal to criminalise sex selective abortion** 7. fails to support the women who are at the very centre of the discussion. **The Serious Crime Bill is not the means by which to address sex selection in our communities.** 8.

To sign and support this statement, email [REDACTED]

1. Untrue. The amendment creates no new criminal offence. The text of the amendment is 'Nothing in section 1 of the Abortion Act 1967 can be interpreted as allowing termination of pregnancy on the grounds of the sex of the unborn child.'

3. Untrue. The amendment does not 'criminalise' - sex-selective abortion falls outside the criteria of the Abortion Act, so a doctor performing an abortion for this reason would be vulnerable to prosecution under the Offences Against the Person Act. THIS IS ALREADY THE LAW.

4. Untrue. The Abortion Act says nothing about coercion.

5. This is pure speculation. If a doctor were required to tick a box declaring that he/she is satisfied that the termination was not being sought on grounds of fetal sex, this would not require 'profiling' of any sort.

6. Simply untrue to say that this a pro-life initiative. More than 100 MPs from all sides of the abortion debate have signed the amendment. Many supporting organisations are pro-choice.

2. Untrue. Dubuc and Coleman (Pop & Devel Review, Vol 33, Issue 2, p 383-400, 2007) found statistically significant gender skewing in the UK which they attributed to sex-selective abortion. Abundant academic evidence from South Asia and China indicates that the practice is widespread. A growing body of anecdotal evidence in the UK supports the view that the problem has translated to the UK. www.stopgendercide.org believes that it would be wrong to wait for skewing in national gender ratios before acting.

7. This is a lie. Refer to points 1 and 3 above.

8. The purpose of the amendment is twofold. 1 - to prevent people arguing that sex-selective abortion is permissible under UK law (this is currently the case), and 2 - to force the Government to consider what help they may be able to provide to stop sex-selective abortion in the UK. The amendment, together with s74(2) allows this.

While no one in the www.stopgendercide.org campaign believes that Government help alone can solve the problem of son preference, but this would be a large step towards recognising and addressing the problem.