

**Voice for Choice**

**Briefing on the sex selection amendment to the Serious Crime Bill**

**February 2015**

There are complex reasons for son-preference in some communities. An amendment to criminalise sex selective abortion does not and cannot tackle any of these. Evidence about the extent of sex selection abortion in the UK may be contested, but there is certainly *no* evidence that the proposed ban would prevent a single sex selective abortion.

There is great concern that the change in law would have an immediate negative impact on women's access to abortion and is a first step towards further regressive legislation to limit abortion access.

**We are asking MPs to oppose this ban because:**

1. It will make women from communities perceived to be 'at risk' of sex selection more vulnerable by:
  - Encouraging ethnic profiling of women seeking reproductive health services
  - Reducing access to abortion for women perceived to be from 'at risk' communities – especially 2<sup>nd</sup> trimester abortion
  - Reducing the likelihood that a woman who is under pressure to have an abortion for sex selective reasons will disclose this to a professional and seek the support she needs
  - Criminalising women who may already be vulnerable or subject to domestic violence
2. The amendment provides protection for some fetuses in some circumstances. Currently the 1967 Act does not recognise the rights of the fetus. **Once this principle has been breached, then all abortion is open to challenge.** This is clearly the intention of the proposer of the amendment, Fiona Bruce MP, Chair of the Pro-Life All-Party Parliamentary Group .
3. The amendment is deliberately intended to undermine the 1967 Abortion Act in which the health of the woman is the legal priority. This amendment would introduce a specific **prohibition which would trump the wellbeing of the woman.**
4. The amendment makes no exception for **sex-linked genetic disorders.**
5. The amendment threatens to undermine the doctor patient relationship and patient confidentiality, it calls into question the integrity of doctors, and will have a chilling effect on doctors who may be less willing to refer for or provide abortion, especially in the second trimester. **It provides no additional protection against coerced abortion, which is prohibited by existing legislation and current practice.**