

Gender abortion

'illegal within months'

Dozens of MPs back amendment to Serious Crimes Bill

that would explicitly outlaw terminations based on sex of foetus

By John Bingham, Social Affairs Editor

ABORTION on grounds of gender may be formally outlawed in the UK within months after dozens of MPs backed a parliamentary motion to fast-track it on to the statute books.

More than 70 members, spanning all the main parties have put their names to an amendment to the Government's Serious Crime Bill clarifying Britain's abortion laws to exclude termination on grounds of the unborn baby's sex.

The possibility of sex-selective abortion in the UK was exposed in a *Daily Telegraph* investigation in which two doctors were filmed agreeing to carry out terminations because the unborn babies

were girls. Police investigated, but the Crown Prosecution Service later refused to bring charges against them, saying that it was not in the public interest.

The decision exposed uncertainty over the law. Ministers insisted that the practice was illegal, but guidance from the British Medical Association says there could be circumstances in which it "would be lawful".

Significantly, the UK's biggest abortion provider, the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (Bpas), maintains that gender abortion is not illegal under the 1967 Abortion Act and that the law is "silent" on the subject.

MPs backed a motion tabled by the Conservative member Fiona Bruce

declaring the practice illegal in November last year in one of the most overwhelming majorities ever seen in the Commons.

But the vote has no legal force and was tabled to send out a "signal" that the practice was not acceptable.

However, the new parliamentary amendment, effectively adding a clause to the Serious Crime Bill, explicitly outlawing gender abortion would end any uncertainty.

The Bill, which contains new measures to combat domestic violence and female genital mutilation, has already completed its committee stage in the Commons and is on course to become law before the general election in May. The amendment,

tabled by Mrs Bruce, had already been signed by 73 MPs.

It is also supported by groups such as Karma Nirvana, which has played a leading role in exposing so-called "honour" crimes and successfully campaigned for a ban on forced marriage.

But opponents of the amendment have described it as "anti-choice" and have claimed that it is a veiled attempt to clamp down on abortion in general.

Mrs Bruce, writing for telegraph.co.uk said: "The time has come to face up to the truth: sex-selective abortion is a reality in the UK; we can no longer ignore it.

"I do not pretend that my amendment can solve the problem of son-preference all on its own, but I know that it is a big

step in the right direction. It is my hope that my colleagues in the Commons will agree that urgent action needs to be taken, and vote in favour of my amendment when the time comes."

Mary Glendon, the Labour MP for North Tyneside, said: "If opposing the abortion of baby girls - often under coercion - makes me anti-choice, then I will wear the label with pride."

Jasvinder Sanghera, the founder of Karma Nirvana, added: "Sex-selective abortion is a reality in the UK.

"This is widely known in diaspora communities and beyond.

"The Government has a responsibility both to women suffering under cultural pressures and to their baby girls."

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