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Letters to the Editor

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Taking steps to stop the scandal of the selective abortion of girls

SIR – Professor Sally Sheldon and a group of academics object to an attempt by parliamentarians to stop the selective abortion of girls (Letters, January 28).

This issue is one that the *Telegraph* exposed. It is about the abortion of girls purely on the ground of their sex – the first form of violence against women and girls.

The academics' letter shows beautifully the need to clarify the law. For too long, confused interpretations of the 1967 Abortion Act have passed unchallenged. Professor Sheldon herself has written elsewhere that the idea that sex-selective abortion is illegal is "far from clear". We cannot sit idly by as a preference for sons results in selective abortion of daughters.

The letter claims that action will require ethnic profiling. This was not true for female genital mutilation – a predominantly cultural practice – and need not be true for sex-selective abortion.

Our amendment to the Serious Crime Bill affords the Government an opportunity to combat the socially destructive practice

of sex-selective abortion and sends a clear message about its illegality.

Fiona Bruce MP (Con)
Mary Glendon MP (Lab)
Angie Bray MP (Con)
Rob Ffello MP (Lab)
Sir Edward Leigh MP (Con)
Jonathan Evans MP (Con)
Sir David Amess MP (Con)
Gary Streeter MP (Con)
Martin Vickers MP (Con)
London SW1

SIR – The letter warning against Fiona Bruce's measure to outlaw sex-selective abortion claims that "any doctor in Britain performing an abortion on a woman against her will would already be committing a crime". However, such abortions are performed on the basis that a woman's mental health will be worse if she does not have an abortion – despite many studies now showing that abortion leaves thousands of women with long-lasting psychiatric and psychological problems.

The signatories of the letter also warn that the amendment to the Bill "erodes women's reproductive rights" as it "seeks to construe abortion as an offence against 'the unborn child'". But in a civil case about a claim for damages on behalf of a child disabled by foetal alcohol syndrome, the unborn child was defined as an "organism" without legal rights.

Ann Farmer
Woodford Green, Essex

SIR – The 47 academics and lawyers who signed the letter object to something being done about deliberate distortion of birth-gender ratios. They ignore the statistics of gender distortion from India, which are causing immense social problems there.

To make sex selection, as a motive for abortion, a specific crime would give clarity to our courts. To prevent abortions of female fetuses (the grossest form of gender inequality) is a worthy aim of MPs.
Dr Peter Sander
Hythe, Kent