

If women don't like baby's sex let them abort, says professor

By Luke Heighton

FORCING pregnant women to give birth to children they may not want because of their sex could harm both the baby and the mother's mental health, a leading British Medical Association member has said.

Professor Wendy Savage, a voting member of the British Medical Association Council, said women should have the right to terminate a pregnancy at any stage.

The comments by Prof Savage to *The Mail on Sunday* come after a proposal to decriminalise terminations passed the first hurdle in the House of Commons last week.

Parents can usually find out the sex of their baby in a mid-term scan between 18 to 21 weeks but some hospitals opt not to reveal the gender, according to the NHS Choices website.

Prof Savage dismissed hospital's concerns and described sex-selective abortions as "myth". But she also said that if pregnant women did not like their baby's sex it would be wrong to force them to give birth.

"Because of this sort of anxiety some places won't tell the woman the sex of the foetus, which is outrageous," she said. "It's her body and her foetus, so she should have that information...if a woman does not want to have a foetus who is one sex or the other, forcing her [to have the baby] is not going to be good for the eventual child, and it's not going to be good for [the mother's] mental health."

It is currently illegal for a woman to have an abortion after 24 weeks for non-medical reasons. But Prof Savage said she had only experienced a "couple" of cases over more than 24 weeks.

She added: "It is a woman's right to decide. It's her body. She is the one taking the risks. The foetus is a potential human life at that stage [in the womb]; it is not an actual human life...I think you've got to concentrate on the [rights of the] woman."

Last Monday MPs voted in favour of the Reproductive Health (Access to Terminations) Bill, which would replace criminal sanctions with regulation by professional bodies.

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