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## YOU CAN'T BE PRO-CHOICE ONLY WHEN YOU LIKE THE CHOICE

ANN FUREDI

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, BPAS

Ann Furedi on the dangers of clamping down on 'sex-selection abortions'.

Imagine this: a newspaper, with an editorial policy opposing abortion, sends a pregnant woman to see a number of doctors intending to expose that doctors break the abortion law. A reporter sets up video footage of a woman saying she wants an abortion on the grounds she has been raped. The doctor agrees. Our paper, The Yellagraph, triumphantly publishes the footage as evidence that 'the law has been broken' because rape is not a legal ground for abortion.

Can you imagine the secretary of state for health ordering inspections of every single abortion clinic in England to investigate whether doctors are approving abortion for rape? Can you imagine it taking the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) more than 18 months to decide whether or not to prosecute the doctor who agreed to the abortion? Can you imagine the shadow attorney general, a Labour MP with a pro-choice reputation, harrying the CPS to prosecute rape-abortion doctors?

No; it would seem crazy. And yet a doctor agreeing to an abortion 'on grounds of rape' would be breaking the law no more and no less than a doctor who agrees an abortion on grounds of sex selection. While it is true that the sex of the fetus is not a legal ground for abortion, nor is rape, or incest, or being 13 years old. Nor is being homeless, or abandoned, or just feeling there's no way you can bring a child into the world. None of these is grounds for abortion per se – yet they are all reasons why a doctor may believe a woman has met the legal grounds of abortion as spelt out in Ellie Lee's recent spiked piece.

No doctor ever hears a patient state the legal grounds for abortion as set out in the Abortion Act 1967 (amended in 1990). Women give reasons why they want to end their pregnancies, and doctors sign a legal document to confirm that in their honest belief ('good faith') their patient meets the legal test – which is that continuation of the pregnancy would likely cause injury to the mental or physical health of the woman. So, when a survivor of rape requests an abortion, we might expect a reasonable doctor to accede because he believes that his patient's wellbeing will be better served by not causing her to give birth to her rapist's baby. The abortion is not on grounds of rape, but on grounds of its impact on the woman's health.

When a 15-year-old girl says she needs an abortion so that she can sit her GCSEs, a doctor cannot approve her abortion on the grounds that she 'has important exams'; exams are not a ground for abortion. But if he honestly believes her reasons mean that she complies with the grounds, then the abortion will be legal. For example, he may believe there will be a risk of injury to her mental health if she does not have the abortion because she faces dropping out of school and being a teenage mum with an unwanted child.

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<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2424111/You-CAN-abort-baby-sex-Outrage-comments-boss-Britains-biggest-terminations-clinic.html>

'You CAN abort a baby because of its sex': Outrage at comments by boss of Britain's biggest terminations clinic

Ann Furedi made the comments in an article online

Critics say she has championed the idea of abortion as contraception

Under current legislation gender-based abortions could be legal

By CHRIS PLEASANCE

PUBLISHED: 00:27, 18 September 2013 | UPDATED: 00:27, 18 September 2013

comments 'You can't be pro choice except when you don't like the choice': Furedi made the claims in an article online

'You can't be pro choice except when you don't like the choice': Furedi made the comments online

The head of the country's biggest abortion charity has said women are legally free to terminate pregnancies because they are unhappy with the sex of their unborn child.

Ann Furedi, the chief executive of BPAS, said no law prevents abortion on grounds of gender – and even compared it to abortion after rape. Her organisation carries out more than a quarter of abortions in England and Wales.

Mrs Furedi's comments follow the decision earlier this month not to prosecute two doctors who agreed to arrange abortions – as part of a newspaper probe – for women who said they did not want girls.

Keir Starmer, the Director of Public Prosecutions, said that although there was a realistic prospect of securing convictions, it would be against the public interest to take the doctors to trial.

The doctors' professional body, the General Medical Council, can still strike them off.

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt called for 'urgent clarification' from Mr Starmer, while Labour's Shadow Attorney General, Emily Thornberry, said: 'Abortion on grounds of gender selection is a terrible crime, and the law is crystal clear on this.'

However, Mrs Furedi's comments have raised the question of whether this really is the case – and whether major abortion providers are quietly carrying out such terminations, which are thought to be increasingly common among some Asian communities.

Writing on the website Spiked, Mrs Furedi said that if doctors decide that going through with a pregnancy will damage the mental health of the mother-to-be, then abortion is within the law.

'A doctor agreeing to an abortion on grounds of rape would be breaking the law no more and no less than a doctor who agrees an abortion on grounds of sex selection,' she said.

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt has sought urgent clarification on the issue

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt has sought urgent clarification on the issue of whether or not doctors could be prosecuted for granting an abortion on the basis of gender

'While it is true that the sex of the foetus is not a legal ground for abortion, nor is rape, or incest, or being 13 years old.

'Nor is being homeless, or abandoned, or just feeling there's no way you can bring a child into the world... yet they are all reasons why a doctor may believe a woman has met the legal grounds of abortion.'

She continued: 'The woman gives her reasons, the doctor decides on the grounds as set out in the law... there is no legal requirement to deny a woman an abortion if she has a sex preference, providing that the legal grounds are still met.

**IS SHE RIGHT? THE LAW SAYS...**

Abortion has been legal since the 1967 Abortion Act set out the grounds on which a woman's pregnancy may be terminated.

The key clause says an abortion can be performed if two doctors decide 'the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk to the life of the pregnant woman, or of injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman or any existing children of her family, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated'.

A further clause, giving weight to Ann Furedi's argument says 'account may be taken of the pregnant woman's actual or reasonably foreseeable environment'.

In other words, if doctors decide pressure in a family where girls are unwanted would affect the woman's mental health, they may approve a termination.

'The law is silent on the matter of gender selection, just as it is silent on rape.'

Mrs Furedi claimed those who want to stop abortion on grounds of sex were hindering the pro-choice movement as much as anti-abortion protesters who picket clinics.

'We either support women's capacity to decide, or we don't,' she said. 'You can't be pro-choice except when you don't like the choice, because that's not pro-choice at all.'

She questioned whether it is right that a woman pregnant with a girl should be made to have the baby if 'her family will disown her and she'll lose her home, her husband whom she loves, and her existing children'.

Since abortion was made legal in 1967, the overwhelming majority of terminations have been carried out on the basis that two doctors agree there is risk of injury to the mental health of the pregnant woman or her family.

Nearly 200,000 abortions in England and Wales are now carried out each year, and abortion ends more than one in five of all pregnancies.

Some 55,000 terminations are performed by BPAS – formerly the British Pregnancy Advisory Service – each year in its clinics, which also provide advice and counselling to pregnant women.

The charity received more than £26million in abortion fees last year, much of it paid by the taxpayer through the NHS.

Anti-abortion campaigners responded with fury to the idea that sex-selection abortions are not only legally acceptable but should even be encouraged.

Divisive: the latest comments from Furedi are sure to provoke strong reactions from both side of the debate on abortion

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Jack Scarisbrick, of LIFE, said the 1967 Abortion Act should be the subject of an immediate inquiry by the CPS and Department of Health.

'The mental health clause amounts to abortion on demand,' he added. 'Why has the Department of Health not stamped out the conveyor-belt of women through the abortion clinics?'

He described abortion in Britain as a 'runaway bus', asking: 'How else could gender-selection abortion – aborting unborn girls simply because they are female – be potentially widely available in abortion clinics across the country?'

#### THE MARXIST'S WIFE ON £125,000 A YEAR

ANN Furedi is a former magazine journalist who has become an outspoken leader of the abortion industry.

In a decade running BPAS, she has repeatedly challenged the widely-held assumption that abortion is a last resort for desperate women who stand to suffer deeply if they go ahead with their pregnancies.

Instead, critics say Mrs Furedi, 52, has effectively championed the view of abortion as another form of contraception. She welcomed news that half of all pregnancies among girls under 18 end in abortion as 'a positive sign'.

A health writer for Cosmopolitan and Company, she became an abortion campaigner in the Nineties.

She was BPAS spokesman in 2000 when she declared that 'it may be time to understand that, for women, abortion is an essential method of family planning and accept it as such.'

She has run BPAS since 2003 and earns £125,000.

In 2009, as Labour's 'teenage pregnancy strategy' to reduce pregnancies with more contraception and sex education collapsed, she saw an increase in abortion as the bright side.

She said: 'This means more young women know how to get the care they need and if they have other plans for their teenage years aside from motherhood, they felt more able to make that choice.'

She is married to Frank Furedi, 66, with whom she has an 18-year-old son.

The former student radical and founder of the Revolutionary Communist Party is Emeritus Professor of Sociology at Kent University and a leading figure behind the Spiked website on which his wife defended abortion on grounds of sex.

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<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2425998/How-Ann-Furedi-support-terminating-baby-shes-girl.html?ico=home%5Eheadlines>

How can the high priestess of abortion support the barbarity of terminating a baby just because she's a girl?

By KATHY GYNGELL

PUBLISHED: 23:30, 19 September 2013 | UPDATED: 08:12, 20 September 2013

To this day, I can still remember the sense of wonder that gripped me one morning in the middle of my first pregnancy. Returning to the office, I could barely concentrate on my work.

I had just been for a scan to check on the health of the baby - this was in the early days of ultrasound medical technology - and the experience of seeing the pictures of my own baby growing inside me was both thrilling and deeply moving.

Neither my husband nor I asked about the gender of our child, preferring the old-fashioned method of wait and see.

Ann Furedi, the chief executive of BPAS, claims that it was perfectly lawful for women to end their pregnancies if they do not like the sex of their unborn child

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Since I come from a family that always seems to produce girls, it came as a great surprise when the baby turned out to be a boy.

Despite my delight in those ultrasound pictures, I decided I would not have any such tests when I embarked on my second pregnancy. I didn't want any of the doubts or distractions that pre-birth scans might generate.

The experience of my second pregnancy, not knowing what to expect, not knowing if the baby was developing normally, mirrored that of women throughout the world and throughout history. Until very recently, expectant mothers have been entirely in the dark about the baby they were carrying.

But all that has changed in recent years. We have now entered a brave new world, where a pregnancy can be terminated simply because the foetus does not meet an arbitrary set of criteria drawn up by the mother - or the wider family.

This moral revolution has been driven by two forces. One is the invention of ever-more sophisticated scanning techniques and other tests, which allow a comprehensive profile of the baby to be provided before the birth.

The second is the aggressively libertarian interpretation of the 1967 Abortion Act, which means that in this country we now effectively have abortion on demand.

Defenders of this seismic shift like to talk about women's rights and 'choice'. But this trend has little to do with true liberation.

On the contrary, it is profoundly damaging. Increasingly, life is being ended, not on the grounds of health as the 1967 Act stipulated, but on the basis of an emotional decision or social pressure.

The nadir of this destructive, immoral approach was reached recently in the shocking revelation that some doctors in Britain have been aborting female babies solely on the grounds of their gender.

Liberal leader David Steel, left, (pictured with MP Mike Hancock and Shirley Williams), architect of the 1967 Abortion Act, which is now completely meaningless

Liberal leader David Steel, left, (pictured with MP Mike Hancock and Shirley Williams), architect of the 1967 Abortion Act, which is now completely meaningless

The appalling practice of sex-selective abortions, it seems, occurs mainly in Asian communities, where a small minority of families still carry the cultural baggage that places a higher social and economic value on boys than girls.

Yet the response of officialdom to the evidence of this phenomenon has been utterly feeble. Shamefully, the Crown Prosecution Service has declared that there will be no prosecutions of those doctors who were revealed to have agreed to arrange abortions of baby girls, despite a 'realistic' prospect of convictions.

Even worse has been the reaction of parts of the so-called feminist 'sisterhood'.

We have categorical evidence of female fetuses being destroyed on the grounds of their gender. Yet few feminists have dared to utter a squeak of protest at this savage act of discrimination. Instead, they either pretend the problem does not exist, or they end up in the bizarre position of defending it.

The latter is the stance taken this week by Ann Furedi, the chief executive of the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS), who claimed that it was perfectly lawful for women to end their pregnancies if they do not like the sex of their unborn child.

'This is not feminism, but the very opposite. It is brutal, institutionalised misogyny on an epic scale.'

'There is no legal requirement to deny a woman an abortion if she has a sex preference,' she said. Going even further, she argued that any attempt to restrict gender selection would undermine a woman's right to choice.

'We either support a woman's capacity to decide or we don't. You can't be pro-choice except when you don't like the choice,' she trumpeted.

It is truly terrifying that Ms Furedi should be in charge of Britain's largest abortion charity, for her statements suggest she has completely lost her moral compass.

The idea that gender selection represents an aspect of a woman's right to choose how to manage her own body and pregnancy is as perverse as it is deluded.

This is not feminism, but the very opposite. It is brutal, institutionalised misogyny on an epic scale. The lethal message being sent out by Ms Furedi, the abortion clinics and the Crown Prosecution Service is that it's acceptable to despise girls, to want them excluded from mainstream society, and even to desire an end their potential existence.

That is precisely the kind of outdated barbarity that feminism is meant to be fighting.

It should be said, however, that Ms Furedi has performed one useful public service.

Through her acceptance of gender selection, she has exposed a truth that many of us have long suspected: that the 1967 Abortion Act has become completely meaningless.

When the Act was introduced by David Steel, later the Liberal Party leader, it was with the aim of ending the outright ban on all abortion in this country.

Under this legislation, an abortion is meant to be carried out only if the continuation of the pregnancy would cause real danger to the physical or mental health of the mother, or if there were evidence of extreme foetal abnormality.

But such qualifications are now treated as a supreme irrelevance. Abortion seems to be granted on the most superficial of grounds, often because it simply isn't convenient for the mother to have a baby at that precise moment in her life.

As Ms Furedi admitted, terminations are now carried out even in cases of mothers 'just feeling there's no way' they can bring a child into the world.

And so we have arrived at a situation where around 20 per cent of all pregnancies now end in an abortion, while 200,000 such procedures are performed every year, more than a quarter of them in Ms Furedi's BPAS clinics.

Abortion has become just another form of contraception.

Just as disturbing is how our readiness to terminate a pregnancy has undermined efforts to promote equality in our society.

In recent years, there has been a tremendous - and wholly welcome - effort by our civic institutions to stamp out discrimination against people with disabilities.

Yet this runs counter to the growing acceptance of the belief that unborn children should be aborted if medical tests show they have genetic abnormalities.

The implication of this trend is that a child who is born with disabilities is not as wanted or cherished as one who is born healthy. Indeed, at its very worst, it smacks of eugenics, the twisted obsession with breeding physical perfection.

Gender selection is just as unpleasant. Any free, democratic society that truly wants to treat its citizens as equal would not dream of tolerating such a sinister practice. In its manifest contempt for female gender, it is the exact opposite of equality.

We cannot go on like this. We cannot continue to provide abortions because a family would prefer not to have a daughter, because their baby might not be 'perfect' or because a baby would be an 'inconvenience' to the mother.

Ann Furedi's sweeping, superficial comments about choice confirm what many of us have feared: that abortion has become a service to be ordered 'on demand.'

By failing to take action against doctors who agree to abort babies on the basis of their sex, the Crown Prosecution Service has all but given its blessing to this morally rotten practice.

Perhaps one day, a politician will have the courage to close the loophole in the law that allows this to happen, but don't hold your breath. Once a social taboo is shattered, it is almost impossible to glue the pieces back together.

Kathy Gyngell is a research fellow at the Centre for Policy Studies.

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<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/sep/19/sex-selective-abortion-womans-right>

Why women have a right to sex-selective abortion

As far as I'm concerned, it doesn't matter why any woman wants to end her pregnancy. If it's to select for sex, that's her choice

Sarah Ditum

theguardian.com, Thursday 19 September 2013 12.40 BST

'Ann Furedi of BPAS ... has won outraged headlines simply by saying that abortion on the grounds of sex selection may be within the terms of the 1967 Abortion Act Photograph: Bwp Media/Getty Images

When you talk about being pro-choice, sex selective abortion is often slung at you as the triumphant gotcha. "You love women so much you want them to be in charge of what grows inside their bodies, but what about the women who are aborted, have a go at answering that? ZING!"

The answer is actually remarkably simple, and it's this: it doesn't matter whether what's growing inside you is liable to end up as a man or a woman. What matters is whether the person it's growing inside – the person who is going to have to deliver the resulting baby, at not inconsiderable personal peril – actually wants to be pregnant and give birth to this child. In a world where it's possible to end a pregnancy safely and legally, it seems like rank brutality to force anyone to carry to term against her will.

And as far as I'm concerned, it doesn't matter why any woman wants to end her pregnancy. As the conscious and legally competent entity in the conception set-up, it's the woman's say that counts,

and even the most terrible reason for having an abortion holds more sway than the best imaginable reason for compelling a woman to carry to term.

In this, I probably sound like a radical. Perhaps more of a radical than Ann Furedi of BPAS, who has won outraged headlines simply by saying that abortion on the grounds of sex selection may be within the terms of the 1967 Abortion Act – which, on a scrupulous reading of the act, it may well be. The act doesn't lay out foetal sex explicitly as a grounds for abortion, but as Furedi points out, it also doesn't lay out rape, incest, poverty, relationship breakdown or being underage as legal grounds for abortion. All those things are nevertheless accepted as legitimate causes for termination.

What the act does say is that an abortion is legal when two doctors agree that "the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated, to the physical or mental health of the woman or any existing children of her family". And that rubric is reasonably understood to comprehend the risks of continuing a pregnancy resulting from rape, from incest, one that would extend a woman beyond her means to support a child, or one that would stop her from completing her education and establishing herself as an independent adult.

What's the difference with sex selection? The most obvious objection is that it doesn't matter what sex a baby is: the UK is an equal society, or at least a society that pretends to equality, and no prospective parent has any reason to prefer a son over a daughter or vice versa. And this is true. It's so true that there is no demographic evidence of women practising sex selective abortion in Britain: this whole scandal is based on a totally fictive set-up.

But what about when a pregnant woman lives in a society that gives her real and considerable reason to fear having a girl? The kind of society where dowry systems mean an inconveniently gendered child could bankrupt a family, or one where a livid patriarch deprived of a male heir could turn his fury on both mother and daughter? In those situations, a woman wouldn't just be justified in seeking sex selective abortion; she'd be thoroughly rational to do so.

Ultimately, if you believe strongly that girls have as much right to be born as boys, then you should also believe that women have the right to decide what happens within the bounds of their own bodies. Sex-selective abortion is a negligible issue in Britain. In the countries where it is a serious concern, it's a symptom of brute misogyny. And the answer to such misogyny is never to deny women power over their own bodies.

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<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/pro-choice-abortion-charity-bpas-chief-exec-ann-furedi-says-women-are-legally-free-to-terminate-pregnancy-because-of-gender-8824854.html>

Pro choice abortion charity BPAS chief exec Ann Furedi says women are legally free to terminate pregnancy because of gender

HEATHER SAUL WEDNESDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2013

For Ann Furedi, Chief Executive of British Pregnancy Advisory Service, pro choice should mean exactly that - even on the grounds of sex selection.

In a piece written for Spiked, Ms Furedi says that anyone who "truly" supports reproductive choice should consider the argument surrounding abortions based on the gender of the foetus, and argues that politicians who want to obtain "pro-choice credentials" should "advocate the removal of barriers to abortion, not seek to increase them".

"Those calling for tighter controls to prevent sex-selection abortion are utterly mistaken if they believe that would help women", she writes.

"You can't be pro-choice except when you don't like the choice, because that's not pro-choice at all."

Her comments come after a decision made by a judge earlier this month not to prosecute two doctors following an investigation by the Daily Telegraph. Undercover reporters from the paper accompanied two pregnant women to nine clinics in different parts of the country.

Two doctors were filmed agreeing to go proceed with the termination after being told the pregnant woman wanted an abortion because of the sex of the unborn child.

Under current legislation, grounds for a termination can only be granted if the continuation of the pregnancy "would likely cause injury to the mental or physical health of the woman."

Doctors must sign a document of good faith, which states that their honest belief is a woman meets the legal test because continuation of the pregnancy is likely to damage the woman's mental or physical health.

She argues that: "Many doctors would rather the convoluted system of certification was ended and abortion was treated as a clinical matter - perhaps like contraception, available at a woman's request."

Ms Furedi suggests that many who consider themselves as "liberal and modern thinking" consider reasons for ending a pregnancy such as rape, incest, youth, poverty, or not wanting the child are acceptable reasons to have an abortion, but they think sex selection is a bad reason.

She writes: "Sex selection, like rape, may not be a ground for abortion, but there is no legal requirement to deny a woman an abortion if she has a sex preference, providing that the legal grounds are still met."

"Take the hypothetical case of a woman who discloses that if her family discovers she is pregnant with another girl, they will disown her and she'll lose her home, her husband whom she loves, and her existing children.

"She doesn't want help to leave her family; she just wants to not be pregnant, now. When politicians like Sarah Wollaston, the Conservative MP, say that 'selective abortion of baby girls harms women', do they really intend that this woman should be sent back home to face the consequences?"

She asks: "Should her abortion be refused, even though a doctor thinks it would be better for her wellbeing if he approved it?"

Mrs Furedi drew fire from pro-life campaigners who said abortion laws are so wide doctors can virtually justify any reason a woman gives.

Professor Jack Scarisbrick, chairman of LIFE, said an inquiry should be held into the 1967 Abortion Act by the Department of Health and the Crown Prosecution Service.

"How else could gender-selection abortion, i.e. aborting unborn girls simply because they are female, be potentially widely available in abortion clinics across the country?" he asked.