

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill

May 2008

Women want a lower abortion limit

Seven in ten women want a lower time limit for abortion, as more and more babies born before 24 weeks of gestation survive.

A ComRes poll conducted in May 2008 found that 72 per cent of women thought the cut-off point for abortion should be earlier in light of improved survival rates among babies born at a stage when they could legally have been aborted.

73 per cent of women said that the limit should be lowered to 20 weeks or below, given that the limit is no more than 12 weeks in most other EU countries.

There is widespread feeling among British women that it is time to reduce the upper limit for abortion.



Moreover, arguments for curbing the availability of abortion are supported by mounting evidence that the practice is harmful to women's physical and emotional wellbeing.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists recently acknowledged that having an abortion can damage women's mental health. Abortion has also been shown to increase the risk of breast cancer and subsequent premature

births.

Unsurprisingly, 92 per cent of women believe that those seeking abortion should be given a statutory legal right to be warned of the risks.

The evidence is clear that both the welfare and – in the case of a convincing majority – the wishes of women in Great Britain would be better served by a reduced upper time limit for abortion.

Public are against abortion at 24 weeks

Three in five people say the abortion time limit should be reduced in light of improved survival rates among babies born before 24 weeks. Support was highest among the 25-34 age group: seven in ten said the limit should be lower. Just 27 per cent of the public thought the limit should stay as it is, while only four per cent want an increase.

Polling details: ComRes interviewed 1,014 GB adults by telephone between 2nd and 4th May 2008. Data were weighted to be representative demographically of all GB adults. ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. See www.comres.co.uk

73% of women think the abortion limit should be reduced to 20 weeks or lower.

70% of 25-34 year-olds want a lower time limit as more babies born before 24 weeks survive.

How does Great Britain's time limit on abortion compare with the rest of the EU?

Abortion limit 12 weeks in most of the EU

Abortion time limits in the EU

Illegal

-  Ireland
-  Malta


10 weeks

-  France
-  Portugal
-  Slovenia*

12 weeks

-  Austria
-  Belgium
-  Bulgaria
-  Czech Republic*
-  Denmark*
-  Estonia*
-  Finland
-  Germany
-  Greece
-  Hungary
-  Italy
-  Luxembourg
-  Poland
-  Slovakia
-  Spain






14 weeks

-  Romania

18 weeks

-  Sweden

24 weeks or above

-  Cyprus
-  Great Britain
-  Latvia
-  Lithuania
-  Netherlands

58%

of people (73% of women) think that abortion should be reduced to 20 weeks or lower in Great Britain in light of the laws in other EU countries.



- 16 countries have an abortion limit of 12 weeks or below, including two where abortion is illegal.
- Five countries have an abortion limit of 24 weeks or above.
- The six remaining countries either allow abortion above 12 weeks if authorised by a committee (* in list) or have an abortion limit above 12 weeks and below 24 weeks.

Sadly the gestational limit for abortion in Great Britain is far higher than in the majority of European countries.¹

Here, the upper time limit for social abortion is 24 weeks. A startling number of social abortions take place in Great Britain each year.

Most countries in the EU, 16 out of 27, have a gestational limit of 12 weeks. An additional four countries (* in list) have a limit of 10 or 12 weeks, although social abortions can be allowed later if authorised by a special committee. Two thirds of EU countries (18) fix their limit lower than Great Britain.

Little wonder then that nearly six in ten Britons – and more than seven in ten British women – want our time limit reduced.

98%

of abortions in England and Wales in 2006 were for social reasons.²

¹ See <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/abortion/profiles.htm> and <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/623557.stm> as at 9 May 2008

² *Abortion Statistics, England and Wales: 2006*, Department of Health, June 2007, Table 2