

Babies aborted for not being perfect in the UK

The ethical storm over abortions has been renewed as it emerged that terminations are being carried out for minor, treatable birth defects.

Late terminations have been performed in recent years because the babies had club feet, official figures show.

Babies are being aborted with only minor defects.

Other babies were destroyed because they had webbed fingers or extra digits.

Such defects can often be corrected with a simple operation or physiotherapy.

The revelation sparked fears that abortion is increasingly being used to satisfy couples' desire for the 'perfect' baby.

A leading doctor said people were right to be 'totally shocked' that abortions were being carried out for such conditions.



Campaigners warned we are turning into a society that can no longer tolerate imperfection. Doctors were recently told they can now screen IVF embryos to try to weed out inherited cancers.

Ethical groups fear parents are opting for abortions because they are not told of the support and help available if they continued with the pregnancy.

Details of the terminations emerged as new figures revealed an alarming rise in the use of an abortion pill that has been linked to 10 deaths.

Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that between 1996 and 2004, 20 babies were aborted after 20 weeks because they had a club foot.

It is one of the most common birth defects in Britain, affecting one in 1,000 babies each year. That means around 600 to 700 babies are born annually in the UK with the problem, which causes the feet to point downwards and in severe cases can cause a limp.

However it can be corrected without surgery using splints, plaster casts and boots. Naomi Davis, a leading paediatrician at Manchester Children's Hospital who specialises in correcting club feet, said: 'I think it is reasonable to be totally shocked that abortion is being offered for this.

'It is entirely treatable. I can only think it is lack of information.'

Figures also show that four babies were aborted since 1996 because they were found to have webbed fingers or extra digits, which can be sorted out with simply surgery.

Remarkable pictures recently have revealed how at just 23 weeks baby in the womb appears to smile, yawn and flinch in pain.

In 2004 it emerged a baby was aborted at 28 weeks after scans showed it had a cleft palate. Curate Joanna Jepson tried to ensure criminal charges were brought against the two doctors involved but the authorities last year decided against prosecution.

She however vowed to continue in her fight to make terminations illegal after 24 weeks and to ensure cleft palates were not included within the term 'serious handicap' and used to justify late abortions.

Ms Jepson reacted angrily to news of the club foot abortions.

'The law was not designed for this,' she said. 'Actions like these are fostering a disposable attitude to human life and I'm extremely concerned it is going on.'

'I am appalled that the medical profession is allowing or even suggesting abortions for these conditions.'

Sue Banton, founder of the group Steps for parents of children with foot disorders, said last year one couple decided to terminate a pregnancy at 25 weeks after discovering their baby would have a section of foot missing.

'We gave them other families to talk to, but they just didn't want to know,' she said. 'It is terrible.'

'I know lots of perfectly nice people with this condition and you just can't imagine them not being here.'

Pippa Spriggs from Cambridge, whose son Isaac is celebrating his second birthday in July, was dismayed when a scan showed her baby had a club foot.

'Abortion certainly was not openly advised but it was made clear to me it was available,' she said.

'In fact he has been treated and the condition has now slowed him down at all.'

Julia Millington, of the Alive and Kicking Campaign, said: 'It is all about our perceptions of perfection.'

'Increasingly things are moving along the lines where nothing is good enough.'

'It seems we can no longer tolerate any imperfection.'

'Babies are at the mercy of ultrasound scans and what they may disclose.'

Michaela Aston, from the pro-life group LIFE, said: 'One sympathises for many of the parents of these unborn children aborted after disability has been detected.

'What information are they being given by healthcare professionals so that they can make a truly informed choice?

'We suspect that many parents make the decision to opt for abortion in complete ignorance of the help and support available to children with disabilities and their families.

'For this, health care professionals must shoulder a large part of the blame.

'If, as a society, we are truly committed to equality for people with disabilities then such blatant discrimination against the disabled unborn must stop.'

But Jane Fisher of the charity Antenatal Results and Choices defended the right of parents to terminate pregnancies when defects are found. 'This is not part of a move towards designer babies,' she said.