

No 'harm' to offspring of new reproductive technologies

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Children are not harmed by being brought into existence even if they suffer severe genetic disease - according to a new report from the University of East Anglia.

The ethics around reproductive technology are discussed in a new article published today in the journal *BioNews* by medical ethics expert Dr Anna Smajdor.

It reveals that laws on reproductive technology are based on a mistaken

belief that harm to children can be avoided by preventing their conception or birth.

Smajdor notes that existing policies and regulation rely on a 'harm threshold' – a point beyond which it is assumed the level of suffering or disability means a [child](#) has been harmed by being brought into existence.

She discusses the recent case of baby Gammy – whose Australian biological parents were criticised for rejecting Gammy on the grounds of his disability, and considers whether babies like Gammy are harmed by being born.

Smajdor argues that the 'harm threshold' is a fallacy. She concludes that no child is harmed by being conceived, however much they may suffer. This calls into question the basis for legislation against risky [reproductive technologies](#).

Dr Smajdor, from UEA's Norwich Medical School, said: "Many people believe that the ethics of new reproductive technologies can be ascertained by establishing whether they would be harmful to offspring.

"Reproductive cloning which might result in children who suffer from genetic anomalies, and the deliberate creation of embryos with disabilities, are both commonly regarded as harmful and unethical. Both practices are illegal in UK legislation and many other jurisdictions.

"But I would argue that if we think certain conceptions are unethical or should be illegal, this must be on other grounds than that the child is harmed by them.

"Our intuitive tendency is to say that a reproductive decision, which results in the conception of a diseased or disabled child, harms the child. But this is hard to explain if the child could not otherwise have existed.

"Deliberately conceiving a disabled child is not the same as disabling a child. Nevertheless many people believe that making such a decision is morally wrong. The challenge for those who do believe so is to establish whether there are grounds for this belief other than that the child has been harmed.

"It is illogical to equate existence with either harm or benefit and new reproductive technologies cannot be condemned on the grounds that children conceived through these means are harmed.

"Harm-based legislation needs to be based on broader harm considerations than those relating to the child who is conceived."

'Beyond the harm threshold' is published in the journal *BioNews* on August 26, 2014.

Provided by University of East Anglia

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