

Study: Fetuses can't feel pain

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A senior psychologist at Britain's University of Birmingham says he has found good evidence that fetuses cannot feel pain.

Stuart Derbyshire says his study indicates proposals to tell women seeking abortions that their unborn child will feel pain, or to provide pain relief during abortions, are scientifically unsound and may put women at unnecessary risk.

Derbyshire examined the neurological and psychological evidence to support a concept of fetal pain. He says he concluded that although still immature, the neural circuitry necessary for processing pain can be considered complete by 26 weeks' gestation.

He argues pain experience requires not only development of the brain, but also development of the mind to accommodate the subjectivity of pain. And he says development of the mind only occurs outside the womb.

He said the biological development to support pain experience is ongoing, but the environment after birth -- necessary to the development of pain experience -- is yet to occur. So, he says, as such, fetuses cannot experience pain.

Derbyshire says, however, the absence of pain in the fetus does not resolve the question of the morality of abortion.

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