

Right to Life Includes Right to Die a Dignified Death: Public Opinion About Euthanasia In India

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The moral and ethical justifiability of euthanasia has been a highly debatable issue for the past few decades. The debate as to whether right to life includes the right to die a dignified death has infiltrated the boundaries of India as well. Even though the exact statistics on the number of euthanasia requests is not readily available, there have been numerous instances in India that have come up in news reports where people have demanded euthanasia (Satija, 2015; Mishra, 2015; HT Times, 2015). Public consciousness about euthanasia reached the pinnacle with the Aruna Shanbaug incident in 1973. Shanbaug, a nurse at KEM Hospital, Mumbai went into a persistent vegetative state when a sweeper sexually assaulted her. Even though the court in a landmark decision in 2011 went on to legalize passive euthanasia in certain instances, the judgement has been taken up for review by a Constitutional bench after a three judge bench (Common Cause vs Union of India, 2014) of the apex court held that the Shanbaug case was decided on the basis of an incorrect reading of the constitutional bench decision in Gian Kaur v. State of Punjab (Gian Kaur vs State of Punjab, 1996).

In 2008, a couple from Uttar Pradesh – Jeet Narayan and Prabhavati, sent a euthanasia plea to the President for four of their sons who were suffering from muscular dystrophy and paralysis (Deccan Herald, 2008). The main reason cited by the parents was their inability to pay such huge expenses for the medical treatment of their sons. In a developing country like India where a lot of people fall below the poverty line, expenses for healthcare come out as a major burden for poor families and this has made euthanasia requests very common.

An empirical study on understanding public opinion in India is administered. Based on literature review, a self-administered survey is formulated. The survey is administered on n= 7314 respondents from almost 15 states in India. The aim of the research is to assess the public attitude in India towards Euthanasia, the specific reasons and circumstances for which Euthanasia is favored or opposed. It is found that 59% of the total sample favored Euthanasia in some form: Passive Euthanasia, Active Euthanasia or Physician Assisted Euthanasia. The research gives an insight on varied reasons behind supporting Euthanasia: Vegetative State, Incurable disease, 90% paralysis, Affordability, Consent of the family. On the other hand, 41% of the respondents in the study do not support legalizing Euthanasia. The purpose of opposing Euthanasia is further examined which include Morality, Not a natural course of life, Social stigma attached to Euthanasia, Religious Sentiment, Social Stigma and Psychological impact on the family. It was also found that younger respondents, within the age limit of 18-30 years old were more likely to support dying with dignity than becoming dependent on the family, friends or relatives. The level of support among various subpopulations and understanding the perception, socio- psychological and attitudinal correlates of euthanasia in India.

It has been seen that countries that have legalized euthanasia are now facing the problem of too many people applying for euthanasia and terminating their lives (Battin, Heide, Ganzini, Wal and

Philipsen, 2007). There is also the fear of exploitation of the old and the poor people. Poor people who are dependent on their family or are considered to be an economic burden on the family will be forced to undergo euthanasia in case euthanasia is legalised. Furthermore, religion plays a very significant role in deciding the society's perception towards legalizing euthanasia (Suarez-Almazor, Newman, Hanson and Bruera, (2002). In a nation like India where the most followed religions are Hinduism and Islam, there is large-scale opposition to the idea of taking one's own life. The study delves into understanding position of Euthanasia among Indian respondents who belong to different religions: Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist along with their religious inclination. The moral argument of this research is to assess if it morally justified letting somebody die a slow and ugly death than to help him escape such misery. An effort is made to understand status of Euthanasia and the public opinion in Indian context. Based on our findings, we aim to offer a proposal for legislators and decision makers by examining current law of euthanasia in India.

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