The State Of Euthanasia In India

Akaash Anandhakumar

Abstract: Euthanasia and suicide are two controversial issues with ardent supporters on both sides of the debate. While euthanasia is much more complex and intricate than suicide, people often put those two on par with each other. While society is still largely divided on the issue of suicide, especially on moral grounds, euthanasia has a bit more support from both sides by very thin margins. While a small majority of western societies support euthanasia in some way or form, it is still a relatively new concept to the Indian subcontinent. This paper narrows the divide between euthanasia and its legitimacy in India, providing instances and incidences of deaths in the country and how euthanasia could help regulate the unavoidable deaths in the form of suicide. The study also proves that the public does support euthanasia in some or all cases, by a majority.

Keywords: Assisted suicide, Disease, Euthanasia, India, Suicide.

INTRODUCTION

Euthanasia can be defined as the act or practice of killing or permitting the death of hopelessly sick or injured individuals in a relatively painless way for reasons of mercy. The debate on the morality of euthanasia has been perpetual since its inception in the early 1930s when societies were formed to advance the cause of euthanasia. While the moral debate on euthanasia is strictly confined to the decision between the living will and freedom of choice, several socio-political factors influence how it is carried out around the world [1]. Proponents of euthanasia argue that those who demand euthanasia have often lost all will to live due to their condition and that the right to life warrants for granting their wish. But on the other side, opponents argue that euthanasia is wrong on moral grounds, especially citing religion. No matter which side of the debate we are on, the undeniable fact is that those who have been pushed to make the decision to end their life deserve, at the very least, the right to be heard and have their opinions validated by an unbiased group or individual who can provide them with the best care possible. Sadly, this does not seem to be the case in most instances where morality is placed above the righteousness of euthanasia. The primary cause for this is the interchangeability and misuse of suicide and euthanasia as one and the same. While most people confuse these two terms, blatantly considering all forms of voluntarily ending one’s life as suicide, it is far from the truth. Suicide, as we know it, is the ending of one’s life for any reason at all. While in this sense, euthanasia does seem to fit under the bill of suicide, there are contrasting differences as to how they differ. Suicide is more impulsive and uncontrolled whereas in euthanasia, the decision reflects the thought of all those involved such as the patient, friends and family, and the physician and other medical service providers. The lamentable part is that while euthanasia has been recognised and regulated, at least in part, in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Switzerland and the United States of America, there is no such law or provision that even recognises euthanasia in India. The aim of this paper is to present a convincing case for euthanasia and how its need should be recognised in the country.

METHODOLOGY

For the current study, articles were extracted using Google Scholar, Web of Science and PubMed. The following inclusion criteria was adopted: (1) The study location was restricted to countries where euthanasia and assisted suicide were legal, at least partly. (2) The articles were published in the English language were included. (3) Only articles published in peer-reviewed journals were included in the study. In order to study the public opinion and acceptance of euthanasia in India, a survey of 100 participants was conducted. The participants were selected using random sampling method. The sample size was determined by the following formula:

\[ n_0 = \frac{Z^2pq}{E^2} \]

The confidence interval of the selected sample is 95%.

ON ASSISTED SUICIDE

The notion that assisted suicide is the same as euthanasia is bogus. While they are similar in principle, assisted suicide is quite different from euthanasia [2]. It is the process by which patients can request an assist from their physicians or medical care provider to end their life. The request is not haphazardly accepted but rather is subject to scrupulous testing and evaluation based on the laws in effect in the region. If found in accordance with the prescribed criteria, then the physician will administer a lethal dose of drugs that will end the patient’s life. While it is controversial, it has been reported that eleven percent of physicians in the United States reported to have received requests for euthanasia or physician assisted suicide [3]. One thing that cannot be ignored is the toll which euthanasia has on the participating physicians. Studies have observed that physicians participating in active euthanasia or physician assisted suicide have reported feeling depressed [4].

THE CASE FOR EUTHANASIA

The first and foremost reason that pushes people to decide to end their life is their health condition. Table 1 gives an estimate of the number of deaths due to cancer worldwide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organ</th>
<th>Incidences</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lung</td>
<td>2093876</td>
<td>1761007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breast</td>
<td>2088489</td>
<td>626679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorectum</td>
<td>1849518</td>
<td>880792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prostate</td>
<td>1276106</td>
<td>358989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach</td>
<td>1033701</td>
<td>782685</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: International Agency for Cancer Research

A study in the United States observed that nearly half of the patients with advanced stages of cancer wished to die in
their own terms [5]. This multiplied with the number of incidences of cancer, and it should not be hard to see why euthanasia is demanded by so many people. The second important reason why euthanasia is allowed is the financial situation of the family of the patients. Many families are unable to afford the high cost of treatment and medicine, especially in countries like the United States. That is another reason why families choose to end life support for patients who are in critical care, especially elderly people. Finally, regulating euthanasia can help prevent unwanted incidences of suicide in the country among people who are unable to live on their own.

PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE OF EUTHANASIA
While only seven countries currently allow euthanasia, the public acceptance of the practice is high in these countries [6] [7]. Since there has been no substantial evidence of a public opinion survey on this subject matter in India, this study set out to conduct one and it yielded conclusive evidence that there is public support for euthanasia, even if by slim margins. When asked whether they support the legalisation of euthanasia, 40.9% said yes, 30% said no and 21.9% said that it should be allowed in some cases.

CONCLUSION
As the society remains deeply divided on the moral issue of euthanasia, this study has clearly illustrated that public acceptance and the need for euthanasia is substantial in our country. Sadly, we do not have anything remotely resembling laws in our country on this subject matter. It is therefore the duty of the Government and its institutions to recognise this issue and take steps to regulate euthanasia in the country.

REFERENCES