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"A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH: EXPLORING THE ETHICS AND CONTROVERSIES OF EUTHANASIA"

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ABSTRACT :

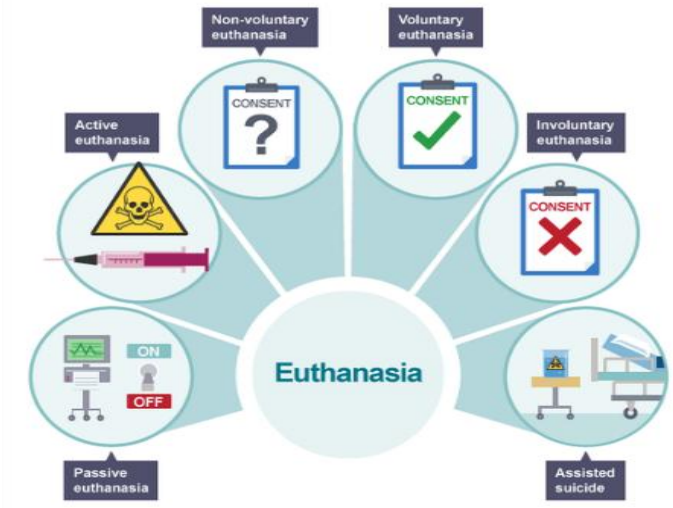
End-of-life care is an increasingly relevant topic due to advances in biomedical research and the establishment of new disciplines in evidence-based medicine and bioethics. Euthanasia and assisted suicide are two terms widely discussed in medicine, which cause displeasure on many occasions and cause relief on others. The evolution of these terms and the events associated with their study have allowed the evaluation of cases that have established useful definitions for the legal regulation of palliative care and public policies in the different health systems. However, there are still many aspects to be elucidated and defined. Based on the above, this review aims to compile the subject of euthanasia from the medical and human rights perspective. It also aims to present the plight of the sufferers and their caregivers and to know people's opinion about euthanasia. An online survey was conducted with the help of questionnaire in order to collect data from a population of above 18 years of age to assess their response towards euthanasia. A total of 85 participants participated in this survey. The data obtained from this survey was analysed, assessed, and interpreted. As euthanasia has long been a controversial and emotive topic, this survey article looks at the debate surrounding the decisions which will allow understanding the use and research of these terms.

Key Words: Euthanasia, assisted suicide, sufferers, questionnaire, debate.

INTRODUCTION

The word euthanasia, originated in Greece means a good death[1]. Euthanasia encompasses various dimensions, from active (introducing something to cause death) to passive (withholding treatment or supportive measures); voluntary (consent) to involuntary (consent from guardian) and physician assisted (where physician's prescribe the medicine and patient or the third party administers the medication to cause death)[2,3]. Request for premature ending of life has contributed to the debate about the role of such practices in contemporary health care.

It seems easy to think that physicians have a position in favor of the act of euthanasia because they are in direct and continuous contact with end-of-life situations, such as palliative care, terminally ill, and critically ill patients. It is important to remember that the Hippocratic medical oaths taken at the time of graduation of professionals are mostly categorical in mentioning the rejection of euthanasia and assisted suicide[4].This debate cuts across complex and dynamic aspects such as, legal, ethical, human rights, health, religious, economic, spiritual, social and cultural aspects of the civilized society. Here we look into the opinions of both the supporters and opponents and also attempt to present the plight of the sufferers and their caregivers. The objective is to discuss the subject of euthanasia from the medical and human rights perspective given the background of the recent Supreme Court judgement[3] in this context.



OBJECTIVES

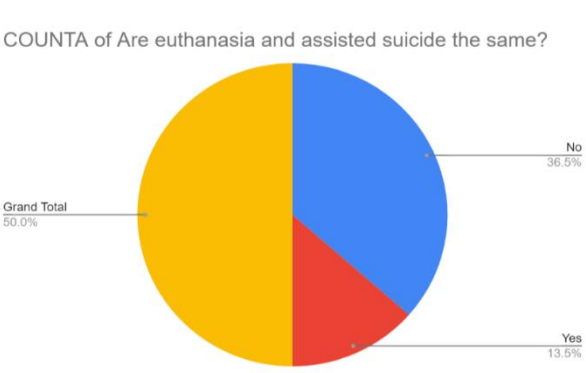
- To discuss the subject of euthanasia from the medical and human rights perspective.
- An attempt to present the plight of the sufferers and their caregivers.
- To know people's opinion about euthanasia.

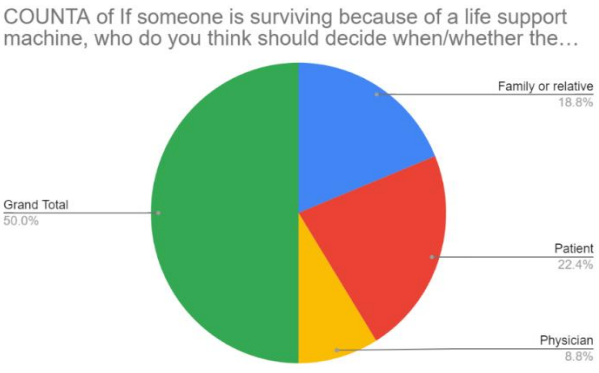
METHODOLOGY

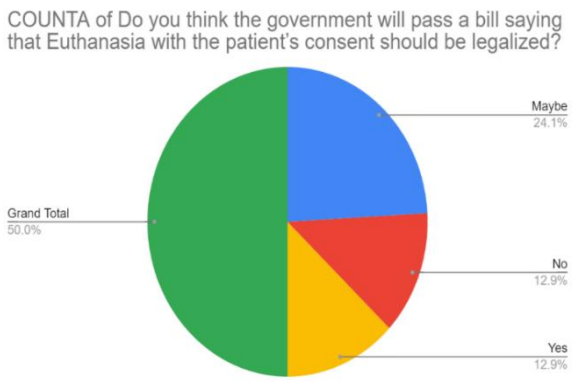
An online survey was conducted with the help of questionnaire in order to collect data from a population of above 18 years of age to assess their response towards euthanasia. Articles were collected from the online sources such as PUBMED, WHO, FDA and GOOGLE SCHOLAR and questionnaires were prepared. The data obtained from this survey will be analysed, assessed, and interpreted.

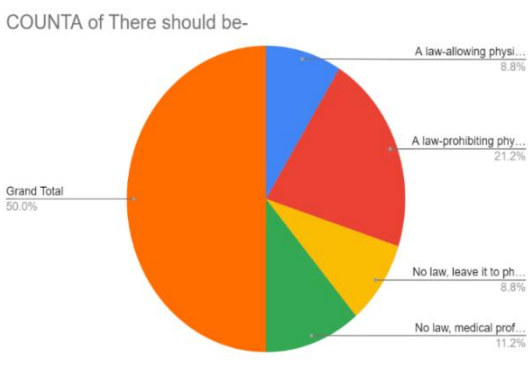
Study type: Cross sectional study
Study site: Community
Sample size:100
Study Duration: 2 months
Inclusion criteria: People of either sex above the age of 18
Exclusion criteria: People below the age of 18
Data source: Articles were collected from the online sources such as PUBMED, WHO, FDA and GOOGLE SCHOLAR.
Materials used: Online Questionnaire
Data analysis: Microsoft Excel 2013

RESULT AND DISCUSSION









QUESTIONS	AGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
The principle moral consideration about euthanasia is the question of whether the person freely chooses to die or not.	26.9%	2.9%	10.6%	7.6%	2.4%
There are some situations in which I will be willing to participate in euthanasia.	13.5%	7.1%	17.6%	2.4%	9.4%
Assisted suicide is never ethically justified.	19.4%	5.9%	15.3%	7.6%	1.8%
Physician assisted suicide is morally justified.	10.6%	11.8%	21.2%	0.6%	5.9%

85 completed questionnaires which included people of age group 18-25 (35.3%), 25-40 (4.1%), 40-55 (5.9%) and above 55 (4.7%) were received. Out of this 29.4% were female and 20.6% were male. 13.5% of the participants considered euthanasia and assisted suicide to be the same whereas 36.5% where on the contrary. Most of the participants were neutral to the fact that euthanasia is ethically and morally justified. Also, around 17% of the participants were neutral towards the opinion that euthanasia should be legalized and that there may be situations in which they might be willing to participate in euthanasia. But around 26.5% of the participants agreed to the fact that the principle moral consideration about euthanasia is the question of whether the person freely chooses to die or not.

Among these participants 8.8% suggested a law-allowing physician assisted suicide and 21.2% suggested a law-prohibiting physician assisted suicide but the rest of the participants wanted no law instead it should be based on the physician-patient relationship (8.8%) or the medical profession should provide guidelines (11.2%). But another fact to be considered was that majority of the participants were unsure of the fact that our government will pass a bill legalizing Euthanasia only under the patient's consent.

FUTURE PROSPECTIVES

Medical science is progressing in India as in the rest of the world, and hence currently we are having devices that can prolong life by artificial means. This may indirectly prolong terminal suffering and may also prove to be very costly for the families of the subject in question. Hence, end-of-life issues are becoming major ethical considerations in the modern-day medical science in India.

The landmark Supreme Court judgment has provided a major boost to pro-euthanasia activists though it is a long way to go before it becomes a law in the parliament. But certain factors must be considered like plight of the sufferers and their caregivers, people's opinion about euthanasia, human rights etc. Moreover, concerns for its misuse remain a major issue which ought to be addressed before it becomes a law in our country.[5]

CONCLUSION

Today there is ranging controversy all over the world about euthanasia. The opponents of euthanasia state that there are moral, religious, and ethical obligations which cannot be ignored. They argue that no one has the right to take away the life of an individual not even individual him or herself. The concept of sanctity of life is inviolable and doctors having taken an oath (The Hippocratic oath) "to preserve life at all costs" cannot justify a patient to die. Euthanasia may be good for the person who is really in a severe pain but at same side it may be dangerous if advantage is taken in a wrong way, so it is necessary that it should be done under supervision. However, the result of implication of euthanasia needs to be re-examined again at regular intervals depending upon the evolution of society with regard to providing health care to disabled and terminally ill patients. The survey results will help in understanding euthanasia from different prospectives.

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