

Attitudes of Older Adults Towards Using Euthanasia at The End of Life in Different Terminal Illnesses

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Abstract

Background: There is a paucity of studies that compare older adults' attitudes towards Euthanasia in two different terminal illnesses. Moreover, these studies did not relate to potentially influencing psycho-social factors. Thus, the current study aimed to examine the impact of a larger range of variables on attitudes towards Euthanasia among older adults in two medical conditions: cancer and Parkinson's disease.

Methods: A total of 501 individuals aged 75 and above participated in the study. Attitudes towards Euthanasia were measured using vignettes which described two conditions: an 80-year-old man with metastatic cancer and with advanced stage of Parkinson's disease. The questionnaire also included measures of past experience (with a close family member or a friend dying from a terminal illness), self-efficacy, will to live, satisfaction with life, will to prolong life, fear of death and dying, social support and background characteristics. The data were analyzed using hierarchical linear regression models.

Results: A more positive attitude towards Euthanasia were found in the case of cancer compared to Parkinson's disease. Being a woman, higher education, lower religiosity level, higher levels of fear of death and dying and higher self-efficacy presented more favorable attitudes towards Euthanasia in both end-of life conditions.

Conclusions: The pattern whereas attitude towards Euthanasia in the case of cancer is significantly more positive than in the case of Parkinson's disease, can be attributed to the prevalence of these illness conditions which is higher for cancer, and to the public's awareness regarding the suffering associated with the deterioration stages in each medical condition. Beyond the important role of the socio-demographic characteristics of gender, education, and religiosity, it appears that fear of death and dying and self-efficacy are important psychological factors in explaining attitudes towards Euthanasia in both conditions among older people. These findings shed light on older adults' attitudes towards Euthanasia in different illnesses.

Keywords: older adults, end-of life, attitudes, euthanasia, illnesses