

REVIEW OF RESEARCH

WHAT COMMON PEOPLE THINK ABOUT LEGISLATING EUTHANASIA IN INDIA: A SURVEY BASED RESEARCH REPORT



MALAY DAS

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Chandernagore
Govt. College West Bengal

ABSTRACT:-

Euthanasia is one of the debatable issues in the world since long. Euthanasia generally means to perform a deliberate action with explicit intention of ending the life of a person, without any selfish motive and purely out of empathy and compassion, who is suffering in an incurable disease and living a meaningless life. The debates over euthanasia primarily develop around the world regarding the question of whether it should get legal status. India is no exception of it. Since the verdict of Supreme Court of India on 7 March, 2011 in the case of A.R. Shanbaug Versus Union of India, where the Apex court allow passive euthanasia in rarest of rare cases sitting strict legal and medical guidelines, the debates over euthanasia get prominence in Indian society. Laws are made for the wellbeing of people. And for that before taking any decision to the question of legislating euthanasia in the country, it is essential to know the sentiment of common people in the society regarding the issue. Aiming to get an impulse of common people regarding the subject under discussion

a survey has been made among common people in various districts of West Bengal. It is found in the survey that a large percentage of younger generation and people belong to the lower income group are in favour of legislating euthanasia, whereas majority of aged persons and affluent ones have reservations on this issue.

KEY WORDS: Euthanasia, Marginalized people, Terminally ill.

Methodology of the Survey

a. Data-collection: The data has been collected from common people belonging to various strata of the society living in various parts of the state of West Bengal, wherever visits were made.

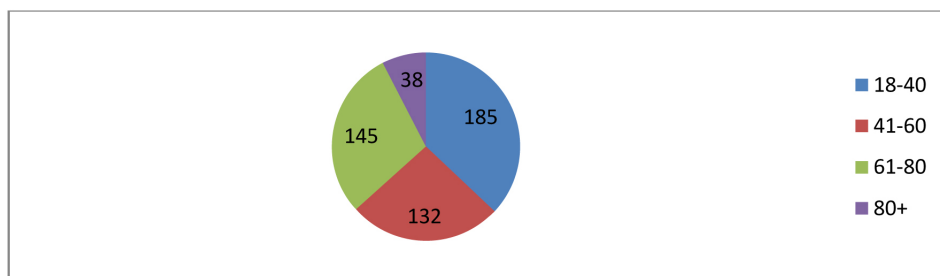
b. Sample size: Interaction had been made with 500 common people categorizing into for different age groups of 18-40, 41-60, 61-80 and above 80 irrespective of their profession and literacy standard.

c. Research tool: A set of questioner prepared both in Bengali and English for common people.

d. Mode of Interaction: Interface discussions were held with people belonging to different strata of society with the objective of sensitizing them about mercy- killing or euthanasia. Usually in the beginning, for sake of easy and effective interaction, we used to explain what euthanasia generally stands for. After that the various issues of euthanasia, its national and international status, its relevance and its socio-legal-moral perplexities used to explain. After that explanation, a questionnaire consisting of various questions relating to socio-moral issues of euthanasia, place before them in order to get a feedback on the matter in concern.

Data Analysis

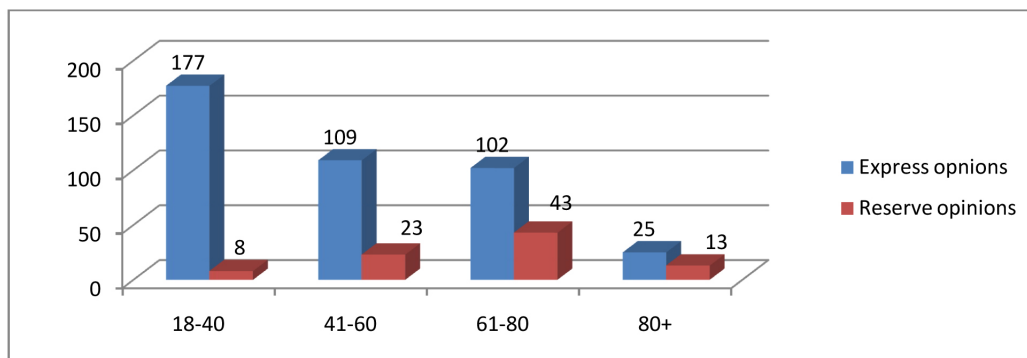
Total numbers of candidates met and interviewed



There are total 500 people with whom we had met and interviewed in order to conduct the survey, categorising them into four different age groups 18-40, 41-60, 61-80 and above 80. Out of that 37% people belong to the first group of age, 29% belong to the second group of age, 26.4% belong to the third group of age and 7.6% belong to the fourth group of age. Majority of Indians at present aged less than 60 years of old. Keeping the fact in mind in this survey 66% people were chosen who are within 60 years of age.

Ratio of candidates who express or reserve opinions

Received Data



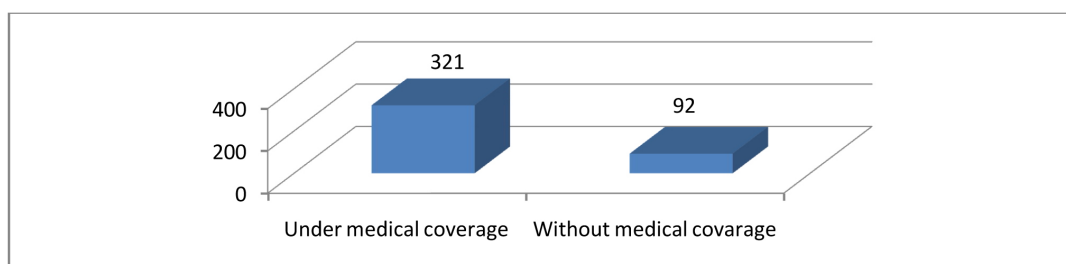
Percentagewise Data

Age Group	18-40	41-60	61-80	80+
Decline to comments	16.60%	21.10%	17.42%	29.65%
Express opinions	83.40%	78.9%	82.58%	70.35%

Findings: The data shows that out of total 500 people, 16.6% reserve their opinions or decline to make any comments regarding the subject matter of the survey. In the age group of 18-40, such type of persons is mere 4.32%, but the percentage gradually increases with the increases of age limit. Among the people, who belong to the age group of above 80, a significant 34.21% people decline to make any comments. On the other hand, it is found that candidates who are comparatively more enthusiastic and actively participate in the survey belong to the age group of 18-40. It is almost 95.68% of people of the youngest age group of the survey express their opinions, which are much higher than other age groups.

Ratio of candidates under medical coverage and without any medical coverage

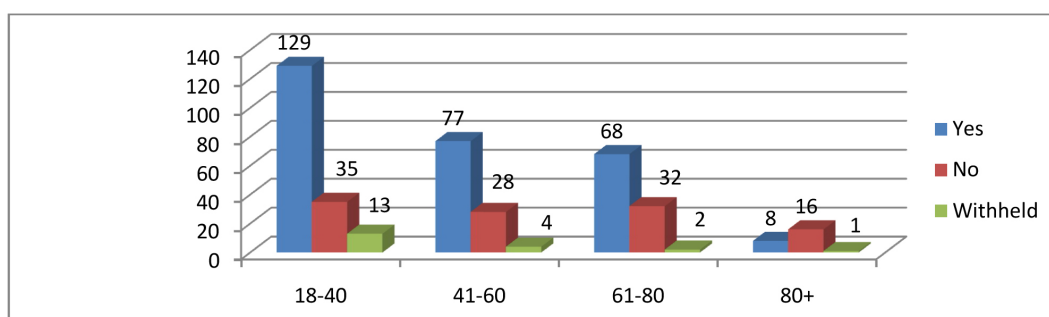
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Findings: Survey reveals that most of the persons out of 413, candidates who express their opinions, 77.72% do not have any medical coverage. Only handful of 22.28% is under a medical coverage. Practically it is the exact scenario of the whole nation. Having under a medical coverage or not having any medical coverage plays a determinate role in deciding the question of legislating euthanasia.

Should a terminally ill patient be granted the right to die?

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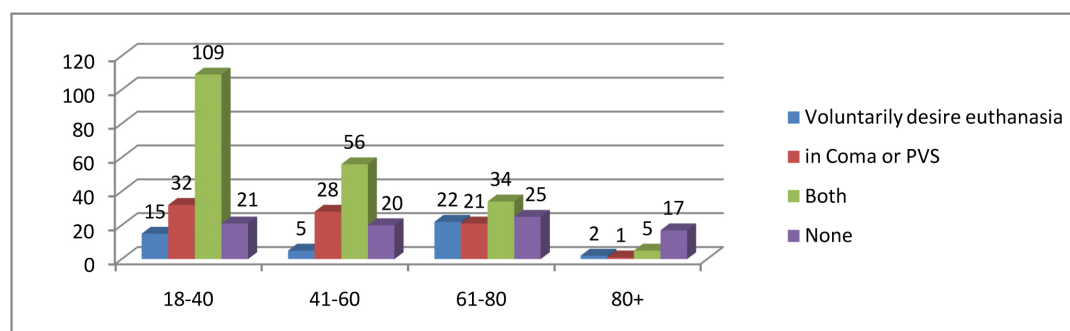
Percentagewise Data

Age Group	1st option	2nd option	3rd option
18-40	72.88%	19.77%	7.34%
41-60	70.64%	25.68%	2.25%
61-80	66.66%	31.37%	1.96%
80+	32%	64%	4%

Findings: The data shows that among the persons aged between 18-40 years, 72.88% are in favour of that a terminally ill patient be granted the right to die. However, the percentage of persons approving right to die gradually decreases from younger ages to older ages. On the other hand, the percentage of people who disapprove the right to die gradually decreases older age to younger age. It is observed that a fewer percentage of people among all age groups staying away to choose a direct answer of the said question and withheld their opinions. As per the data, if we go through from younger age to older age, it would be seen that in percentage term those who are against the right to die comparatively greater among older people.

What type of terminally ill patient may come under the purview of euthanasia?

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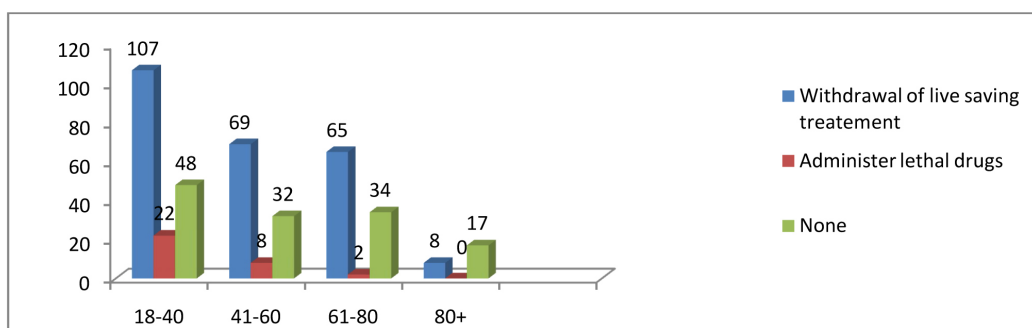
Percentagewise Data

Age Group	1st option	2nd option	3rd option	4th option
18-40	8.47%	18.07%	61.58%	11.86%
41-60	4.58%	25.68%	51.37%	18.34%
61-80	21.56%	20.58%	33.33%	24.50%
80+	8%	4%	20%	68%

Findings: The data shows that among the age group of 18-40, 8.47% of people support euthanasia who desires it voluntarily, 18.07% persons approve euthanasia who lying in coma or in PVS, a significant 61.58% of people supports euthanasia in both situation, i.e, who willingly desires it and who is in coma or in PVS, only handful of 11.86% choices the fourth alternative or none. In the case of age group of 41-60, there is a similarity in data with the previous age group. The smaller percentage of people approve the first and fourth alternative (respectively 4.58% and 18.34%), and higher percentage of people in favour of second and third alternative (respectively 25.68% and 51.37%). The situation differs in case of the age group of 61-80. In that age group, we find that significant 21.56% of people in favour of first alternative, which is higher in percentage term than the second alternative (20.58%). The choices of third alternative in this age group significantly decrease, while the choices of fourth alternative increases. It is very interesting to note, in the age group of above 80, that majority of persons (68%) choice the fourth alternative or votes for that none of the voluntarily desire euthanasia or a patient is in coma or PVS should come under purview of euthanasia.

What is the best alternative to carry out euthanasia?

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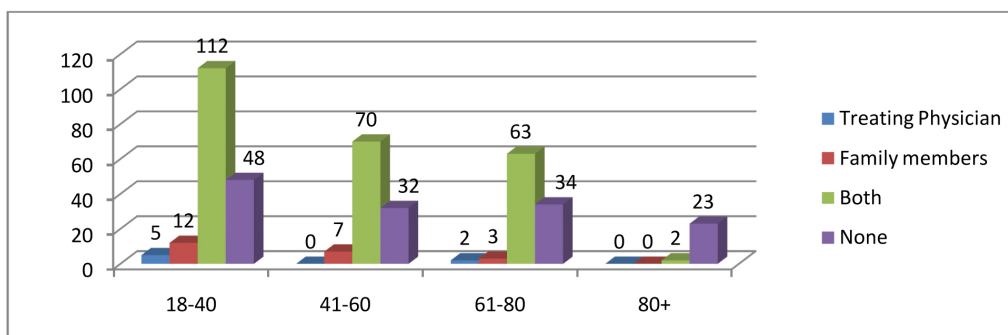
Percentagewise Data

Age Group	1st option	2nd option	3rd option
18-40	60.45%	12.42%	27.11%
41-60	63.30%	7.33%	29.35%
61-80	63.72%	1.96%	33.33%
80+	32%	0%	68%

Findings: The data shows that among the age group of 18-40, majority 60.45% of people are in favour of withdrawal of life saving treatment is the most acceptable method to carry out euthanasia, only 12.42% people are in favour of administer lethal drugs for hastening death and 27.11% do not consider any of them as the best available method to carry out euthanasia. It is to be noted that in both the age group of 41-60 and 61-80 majority percentage of people (63.30% and 63.72% respectively) favours first alternative but it is interestingly lower in case of the age group of above 80. In that age group the majority percentage of people, i.e 68%, favour none of the alternatives are suitable for hastening death in case of euthanasia. Another interesting feature of that age group that no one in favour of second alternative, i.e, administer lethal drugs to hastening death; people of other age groups also support the second alternative in smaller percentage.

Who should take the decision of euthanasia in case of a patient who is in come or in PVS?

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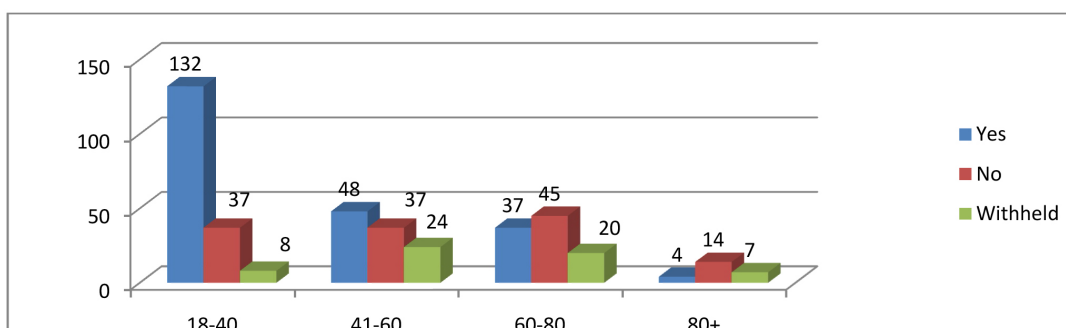
Percentage Data

Age Group	1st option	2nd option	3rd option	4th option
18-40	2.82%	6.77%	63.27%	27.11%
41-60	0.00%	6.42%	64.22%	29.35%
61-80	1.96%	2.94%	61.76%	33.33%
80+	0%	0%	8%	92%

Findings: The data shows that major percentage of people in the age group of 18-40, 41-60 and 61-80 (63.27%, 64.22% and 61.76% respectively) think both the treating physician and family members should take the decision of euthanizing one who is in come or in PVS. However, the statistics differs where the persons belong to the age group of above 80 are concerned. Majority of them think that no one is eligible to take the decision of euthanasia in such a case.

Is euthanasia morally justified?

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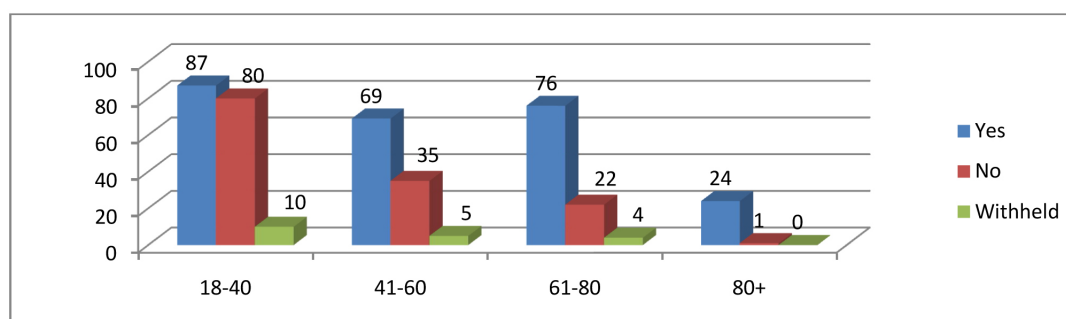
Percentagewise Data

Age Group	1st option	2nd option	3rd option
18-40	74.57%	20.90%	4.51%
41-60	44.03%	33.94%	22.01%
61-80	36.27%	44.11%	19.60%
80+	16%	56%	7%

Findings: The data shows that in the question of moral justification of euthanasia there is an enthusiasm among those who belong to the age group of 18-40. 74.57% of people in the age group think that euthanasia is morally acceptable, but such an enthusiasm is absent in other age groups. Less than 50% of people belonging to the age group of 41-60 and 61-80 think euthanasia are morally justifiable, whereas in the age group of above 80, majority of persons 56% think that euthanasia is morally unacceptable.

Does euthanasia go against the principle of medical ethics?

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Percentagewise Data

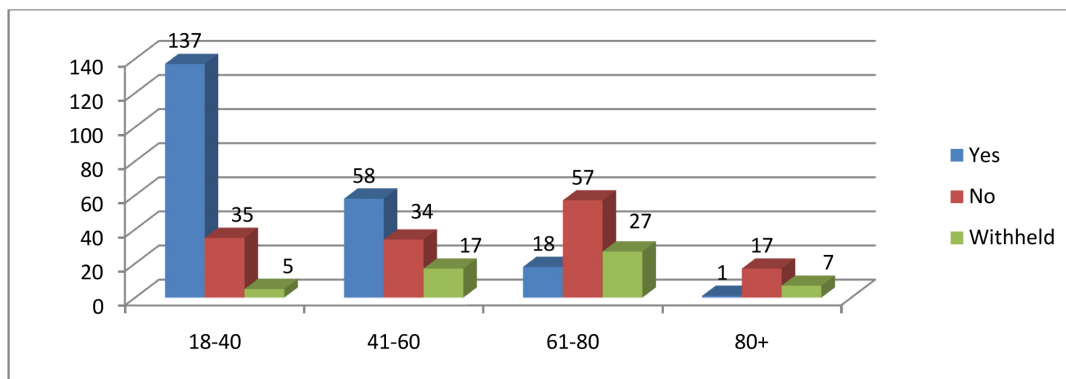
Age Group	1st option	2nd option	3rd option
18-40	49.15%	45.19%	5.65%
41-60	63.30%	32.11%	4.58%
61-80	74.50%	21.56%	3.92%
80+	96%	4%	0%

Findings: The data shows that out of total number of candidates, who express their opinions, majority think that the act of euthanasia is inconsistent with the basic principle of medical ethics. It is only the age group of 18-40, where almost equal percentage of people opines in favour and unfavour of the question is concerned. Whereas, the other three age groups are concerned, it is found that the percentage of people

sharing the thought that euthanasia is inconsistent with the principle of medical ethics is much higher than that of other alternatives. It should be notified that in the age group of above 80, 96% of people believe that euthanasia is against the principle of medical ethics.

Is the life of a brain dead person or a patient in complete vegetative state futile?

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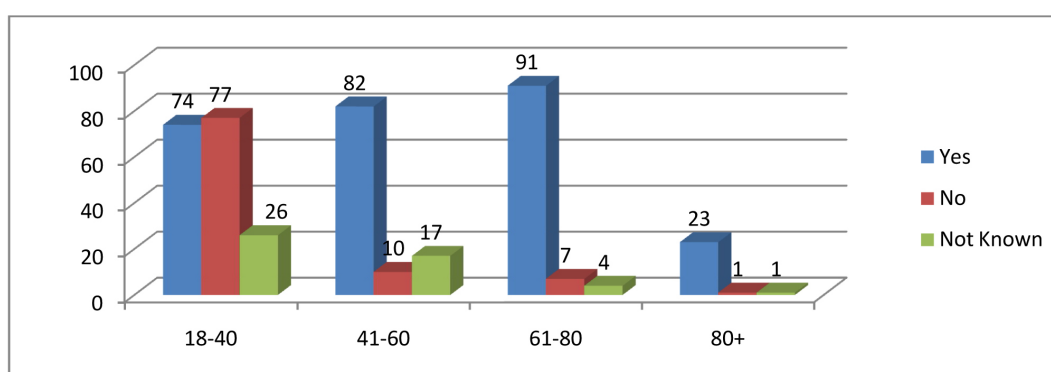
Percentage-wise Data

Age Group	1st option	2nd option	3rd option
18-40	77.40%	19.77%	2.82%
41-60	53.21%	31.19%	15.59%
61-80	17.64%	55.88%	26.47%
80+	4%	68%	28%

Findings: The data shows that regarding the question there is a difference between the first two age groups with the last two. Majority of persons belong to first two age groups (77.40% and 53.21% respectively) think that the life of a brain dead person or a patient in complete vegetative state is futile, whereas, majority of last two age groups (55.88% and 68% respectively) opines that life of a person in such a state cannot be considered to be futile.

Will the legislating euthanasia push aged persons in the society to more vulnerable position?

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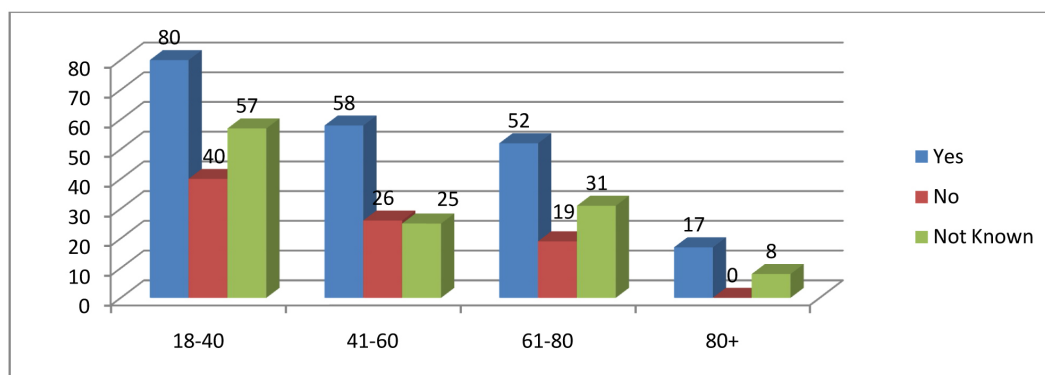


Percentage Data

Age Group	1st option	2nd option	3rd option
18-40	41.80%	43.50%	14.68%
41-60	75.22%	9.17%	15.59%
61-80	89.21%	6.86%	3.82%
80+	92%	4%	4%

Findings: The data shows that there is a clear distinction between younger people and older ones. Majority of persons belong to the age group of 18-40 opines in favour of that legislating euthanasia would not make aged persons in the society more vulnerable position. On the other hand majority of persons belong to older age groups believe just the opposite. In percentage term it is as high as 75.22%, 89.21% and 92% in case of the age group of 41-60, 61-80, and above 80 respectively.

Once legalized, will the right to die as form of euthanasia be misused?



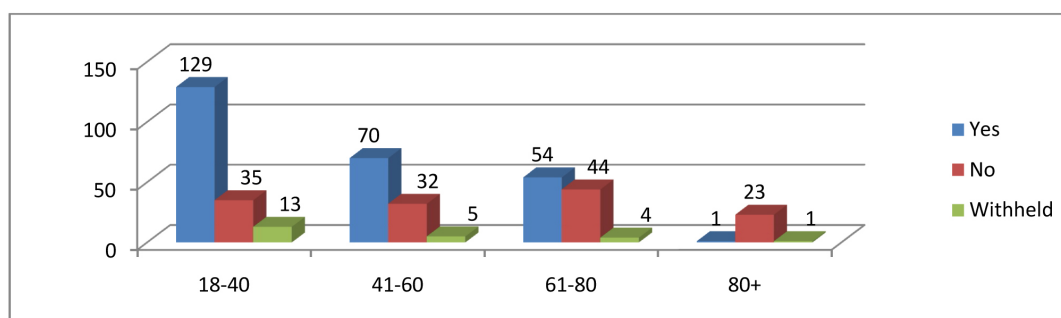
Percentagewise Data

Age Group	1st option	2nd option	3rd option
18-40	45.19%	22.59%	32.20%
41-60	53.21%	23.85%	22.93%
61-80	50.98%	18.62%	30.39%
80+	68%	0%	32%

Findings: As the data indicates that majority of people among all age groups share the thought that the act of euthanasia might be misused if it gets legal status. Out of total 413, who express their opinions in this survey, more than 50% believes that the law of euthanasia would be misused. Believers of other two possibilities are much lower.

Should euthanasia be legalized in India?

Received Data



Percentagewise Data

Age Group	1st option	2nd option	3rd option
18-40	72.88%	19.77%	7.34%
41-60	64.22%	29.35%	4.58%
61-80	52.94%	43.13%	3.92%
80+	4%	92%	4%

Findings: Majority of persons belongs to the age groups of 18-40 and 41-60 are in favour of euthanasia. It is as high as 72.88% people belong to the age group of 18-40 favours legislating euthanasia in India. Whereas the o age group of 61-80 is concerned, it is found that there is no much difference between percentage of people who support in favour of legislating euthanasia and who do not. However, the statistics is completely different where the person belong to above 80 is concerned. Almost all, 92% of people, in that age group vote against legislating euthanasia in India.

Concluding remarks

It should better to admit before coming to conclusion that this survey and any such kind of survey cannot be conclusive. It is quite impossible to understand and predict the complex human mind. The mindset of people varies from time to time and differs from context to context. Those who today favour legislating euthanasia may alter their positions in future and raise voice against it. The opposite may also true. In spite of these inner weaknesses, we need to carry out such kind of surveys. We find a glimpse of human understanding on a particular social issue from this type of survey. As it is depicted from this survey that younger generation and workers in unorganized sector, such as riskaw pullars, contractual labours, etc, and those who have not any medical insurance (or completely unaware of such kind of insurance) favour legislating euthanasia much more than older generations or who works in a organised sector or under the cover of reasonable medical insurance. It might be that a contractual labour who presently is in favour of legislating euthanasia may oppose it if he gets a well settled job with reasonably good medical cover. That does not alter the truth that euthanasia is favourable to economically weaker section or marginalized people. Medical expenses in India increases day by day, majority of Government Hospitals are in dilapidated state, lack of public health scheme and many other such disadvantages force marginalised people to a vulnerable situation when a member of their family suffers in an incurable disease and living a meaningless life. The patient himself and the family members both are willing to get rid of that stressful situation. Legislating euthanasia might be an answer in such a case. In this survey we just get this reflection. Younger generation, where we find more literacy, response to this survey more vividly and opine in favour of legislating euthanasia taking cognizance of the problems which marginalized people face. India is a nation

where majority of people belong to lower income group. At the same time it comes out from the survey that older persons have some reservation of legislating euthanasia. It signifies that they have a sense of insecurity in legislating euthanasia and it is obvious. We have prior experiences that in our country there are lots of cases where laws are misused which laws were specifically brought for some humane reason. 498A is an instance of it. The apex court of India allows passive euthanasia for rarest of rare case sitting strict legal and medical guidelines. It asks for debate in parliament, states assembly and also in public domain. Time will tell whether or not euthanasia will legalize in India. Whatever decision is made, we hope that legislators will take all socio-legal-moral aspects relating with euthanasia carefully and consider them compassionately.

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