

Should euthanasia be  
legalised in the uk?



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

All findings, wrote in the format of a formal report, must be completed to a high standard in order to meet the criteria for OCN Access to Higher Education. There were several limitations present whilst producing this assignment which included: time constraints for final submission and a set word count of 2000 words. Therefore consideration was taken into account regarding chosen topic; it would need to provide sufficient information to research and evaluate without becoming too complex or time consuming.

## Introduction

Euthanasia is a controversial topic and has been brought to public attention many times when individuals have tried to promote their right to die; the most recent case focusing on a gentleman named Tony Nicklinson. He took his case to high court where he pleaded judges to give his doctor a “common law defence of necessity” against any possible murder charge, as he wanted to end his life but required assistance to do so. Tony was denied his application and the dispute as to whether cases like this should be legalised still continues. Governments have been asked many times to grant individuals the right to choose their own death however this would mean legalising euthanasia, but is this right?

Euthanasia is defined as the intentional ending of a life in order to relieve suffering or pain; it can be classified as three different groups which are:

Voluntary euthanasia; the person involved requests that they die, this is legal in some countries and United States of America.

Non-voluntary euthanasia; the person involved can not express their wishes or make the decision to end their life which means no consent is given, this is illegal in all countries.

Involuntary euthanasia; the persons life was ended against their will; this is usually considered as murder.

This report looks at whether euthanasia should be legalised in the United Kingdom and people's views regarding some of the other issues, such as age restrictions. A conclusion will be drawn from all research and information gathered. Both primary and secondary data were used for this particular study to help the researcher look more in-depth at the topic of euthanasia. Primary data, is data collected by the researcher via questionnaires, interviews or observations; It enables the researcher to obtain the most accurate and up-to-date data. Secondary data is data used, that was previously collected by someone else such as literature, journals or case studies and reports.

## PROCEEDINGS / METHODOLOGY

### Method Chosen

Questionnaires and Literature research were the chosen methods for this report. They are the most effective given the timescale for completion; they allowed opportunity to collect quantitative data in a short period of time. The questionnaire also allowed anonymity which enables the participants to give more open and honest views. Different methods were considered but were seen as irrelevant or unsuited for this particular study such as:

Observations – this was not considered, as observing a person that wants to end their life would be biased. The observer could easily be swayed to agree euthanasia is appropriate due to the emotion of watching another person suffering. It would also have to be considered whether this would be ethical as it could be intrusive.

Case study – This could be beneficial, however for the purpose of this report it was not appropriate given the time constraint for completion and the word limit would not give scope for an in depth case study to be compiled.

Interview (self-report studies) – again this method was not an option due to the time restraint and no known participants in the local area who may be of use.

## Participants

The study targeted the general public within a local area of County Durham. Twenty questionnaires were handed out and all were received back, fully completed. There was a gender split in participants having twelve female and eight male subjects, aged eighteen to forty-five.

## Apparatus

A questionnaire (See appendix 1) was made up of eleven questions, including both open and closed questions; this allowed both qualitative and quantitative data to be generated and gave an opportunity for the participant to elaborate on certain answers with their own views and opinions. The data was collected within a one week period so that it could be evaluated and recorded in a timely manner to aid completion of this report.

A tally chart (See appendix 2) was developed from the questionnaire in order to view findings more accurately; the findings are further recorded in a graph (See appendix 3) using all data collected.

#### Procedure: Primary Research

A questionnaire was compiled (See appendix 1), which was made up of standardised questions; a variety of open and closed questions were used and it had areas for the participant to elaborate on answers and add personal views or comments that may help to support the questionnaire. This was then handed out to a group of 20 individuals and a clear timescale was identified for the return of the data. Due to ethical concerns, a disclaimer indicated that any uncomfortable questions did not have to be answered.

#### Procedure: Secondary Research

Literature from published authors and internet research were carried out to get a more in-depth insight into euthanasia and the real cases and issues where people have been affected by the decision of whether or not the UK should legalise the decision to chose when your life ends.

#### FINDINGS (See appendix 2 & 3)

All twenty subjects were for euthanasia, and said that it should be legalised in the UK, but the questionnaire (See appendix 1) brought out differing views regarding, under what circumstances it should be made legal, for example only for terminal illness.

The research findings showed that there were a higher number of participants that believed euthanasia is not right for children; therefore the only way this could be further explored would be to survey participants under the age of eighteen which may cause conflict.

The tally chart (See appendix 2), provided an alternate way of viewing the findings generated from the questionnaire (See appendix 1), and clearly showed that whilst all 20 subjects said that euthanasia should be legalised, there was no consistency with the other questions such as age, when it should be legalised and whether a parent can make the decision for a child. The questionnaire raised awareness that legalisation is not something you can simply say yes or no to because it highlights many other intricate details that needed further clarification.

## ANALYSIS / DISCUSSION

Whilst all participants that were surveyed through the questionnaire method, said that they were in support of euthanasia (See appendix 3), it is evident that once the subject is broadened, views change in regards to it being something that should only be a voluntary option for an adult. This raises further questions in relation to children having the right not to continue their life in suffering and pain and that the parent or guardian has the final decision, but this has not been considered in-depth due to the word limitation of this assignment.

Those surveyed were less favourable about involuntary euthanasia, as someone else is required to assist to end a person's life, and in regards to a parent making a decision about their child. Therefore if euthanasia is to be

legalised the findings from this study strongly suggests that it would be voluntary euthanasia that would be the more suitable option to be agreed on, as the decision and actions required are taken upon by the person involved only and not other third party would need to be involved in ending a life. Research through the questionnaire was limited as people did not fully expand on the questions that they were asked to, which did not allow for in-depth discussion regarding the specific questions (See appendix 1).

After collecting and generating all data from the primary research (See appendix 1, 2 & 3), internet and literature research was conducted in order to try and elaborate further on the findings that was brought to light during the primary research. It was found that whilst euthanasia is illegal in most countries, it is however legal in the Netherlands for people who suffer with a terminal illness or pain and providing that full consent is given by the patient, then a doctor is authorised to end that person's life by lethal injection. This causes much conflict regarding patients who believe that travelling to the Netherlands is acceptable to end their lives, however if another person accompanies them there with the intent of that patient having their life ended, as soon as they land on British soil they can be arrested and prosecuted under English laws. In 1935, a voluntary euthanasia society named EXIT was established and has since dedicated their time to try and help these patients win cases for voluntary euthanasia to be made legal in the United Kingdom; this sparked much controversy between the public and many arguments for and against the cause were brought forward. Many of these polls indicated strong arguments both for and against euthanasia which include:

For:

People should have the right to chose when and how they die.

The quality of the person future would be limited to endless pain and suffering and in some cases loss of dignity if person care is needed.

It would remove the burden for others to be life long carers. I. e. family members.

People end the lives of animals that are terminal or suffering so why should humans not be grated the same respect to end their suffering.

Against:

It contradicts a doctor's oath to save lives and may lead to malpractice.

Live is scared and should be maintained at all costs.

Many people believe life is a gift from God and only he can decide when life should be over.

Hospices were introduced to help with the last journey of life, they can administer pain relief and do everything possible to help a person finish their lives with as little distress and as much dignity as possible.

## CONCULSION

This study has shown that the topic of euthanasia is very complex and legalisation is not a straight forward decision to make. As euthanasia is a life decision that can not be reversed, it is crucial that any law to allow this



would have to be very clear and detailed regarding if and when it is acceptable. Taking into account all of the research conducted in this report, there has not been a definitive concluding answer that can be agreed upon, as to whether or not euthanasia should be legalised in the United Kingdom. It outlines that many cases have solid reasoning for euthanasia to be legalised, in order to end pain and suffering. Having said this if cases are to be granted it may escalate and lead to vulnerable people been taken advantage of and peoples lives may be ended against their wishes, if the final decision was authorised to be made by others, i. e. doctors or family members.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

A more effective method of research could be one to one interviews with individuals or joining a group debate as an observer. Case study comparison would also be a good method of research if you could identify individuals with the same diagnosis and prognosis for the future and different views on euthanasia.

Separate studies into voluntary, non-voluntary or involuntary euthanasia would allow the research to be totally focussed on each area to be able to expand the findings and if the three studies were analysed it would give a more focussed understanding of people's views.

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