



Most of SA accepts euthanasia, study finds

Family members should be allowed to switch off the life support system of a brain-dead person, say 70 percent of adults approached in a recent survey.

But half of them opposed active euthanasia, indicated the poll results released on Monday.

The telephonic survey was conducted by Research Surveys among 493 adults in urban areas last month.

Said researcher Neil Higgs: "There is a fair amount of agreement that, if a person is on life support and brain-dead, her or his husband or wife or family member should be allowed to make the decision to turn off the life support system."

Religion also played a significant role in responses

The first question posed to respondents was whether a patient's family should be allowed to turn off life support systems if the individual had been declared brain-dead.

Seventy percent of those who agreed were Christians, 89 percent Muslims or Hindus, 65 percent Ancestral or other, while 58 percent of the respondents had no religion.

"Clearly, one's culture plays a notable role in one's views on this question," Higgs said.

Religion also played a significant role in responses, but gender had no impact.

On the issue of the right to die when terminally ill, people were "sharply divided", said Higgs.

Half of those questioned agreed people should never be allowed to take their own life, even if they were terminally ill and in considerable pain.

Almost 60 percent of people holding this view were black, 35 percent white, 56 percent Indian and 47 percent coloured.

Forty-four percent of respondents disagreed with the statement.

"On this clearly contentious issue, differences between the race groups are very strong, but it is interesting to note that differences between different religions are not evident."

He said people older than 46 were more likely to disagree with the statement.

The third statement put to the respondents was that a terminally ill person had the right to die with medical assistance from doctors.

Forty-six percent of the respondents agreed with this, while 51 percent disagreed.

Of those who agreed, 37 percent was Black, 60 percent was white, Indians constituted 50 percent of those who agreed and 49 percent was Coloured.

"Again, differences in response between religions are not evident. Neither are there any age or gender differences."

Higgs concluded it was relatively acceptable for the life support of a brain-dead patient to be turned off, but taking one's life even in extremes remained controversial.

"Culture plays a major role in shaping one's views on these issues, but religion, perhaps surprisingly, plays a much lesser role," said Higgs. - Sapa

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