

Question:

The proponents for Assisted Suicide (AS) claim that “82% of disabled people support AS.” Is this figure true?

<https://www.dignityindying.org.uk/blog-post/79-disabled-people-support-change-law-assisted-dying/>

Answer:

The short answer is no, it is not a justified conclusion.

The longer answer is as follows, and looking at a number of polls.

2015

The “Dignity in Dying” (DiD) lobby group for human euthanasia commissioned a poll around 2015 from the Populous organisation.

First, we need to look at the 2015 polling question by DiD which was:

Q.1 Currently it is illegal for a doctor to help someone with a terminal illness to end their life, even if the person considers their suffering unbearable and they are of sound mind. A proposed new law would allow terminally ill adults the option of assisted dying. This would mean being provided with life-ending medication, to take themselves, if two doctors thought they met all of the safeguards. They would need to be of sound mind, be terminally ill and have six months or less to live, and a High Court judge would have to be satisfied that they had made a voluntary, clear and settled decision to end their life, with time to consider all other options. Whether or not you would want the choice for yourself, do you support or oppose this proposal for assisted dying becoming law?

This question is 139 words long, and using eight different methods to calculate how complicated the wording is, this question requires university-level skills to understand it. So this isn't for the general population.

Secondly, the question makes use of a known bias in polling.

Since the 1980s the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey has asked the following question continuously. “Suppose a person has a painful incurable disease. Do you think that doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient’s life, if the patient requests it?”

The key here is how people interpret the word **incurable**. A large majority of the public have always agreed with this statement, starting at 75% in 1984 and rising to more than 80% since the 1990s.

But public support drops massively, down below 50%, if you change the question to explain that the person’s condition is incurable and painful but **not terminal**. Public opinion assumes that a person only requests death if they are already in the stages of dying.

In a similar way, people tend to support assisted **dying** but not assisted **suicide**.

The DiD question is deliberately complicated in its wording, we believe, because it is trying to equate assisted suicide as being the same as assisted dying.

An example of a fairer poll, more in line with all the British Social Attitudes surveys since the 1980s and this time talking to disabled people directly, is the one by Scope in 2014 as follows.

2014, Scope

A Scope poll in 2014 found that:

- The majority of disabled people (64%) – including nearly three-quarters (72%) of young disabled people – are concerned about moves to legalise assisted suicide,
- Nearly two thirds (62%) of disabled people concerned about a change in the law worry that pressure would be put on disabled people to end their lives prematurely, and

- The majority (55%) of disabled people are concerned that if assisted suicide was legalised in the UK, disabled people might choose it in order not to be a burden on family, friends, or caregivers.

The majority of disabled people (55%) believe that the current ban on assisted suicide protects vulnerable people from pressure to end their lives.

The full details from the Scope 2014 poll are in pages 5 to 8 of this note.

These details were obtained from the Google Cache for Scope's website. Scope has recently rebuilt its website and some older pages such as this one have been deleted rather than archived. Below is the original site URL, but it is no longer accessible:

<http://www.scope.org.uk/media/press-releases/july-2014/assisted-suicide-law>

2014, DiD

The "Dignity in Dying" (DiD) lobby group for human euthanasia commissioned a poll around 2014 from the YouGov organisation. We understand that the poll was of 1036 disabled people, as reported by the BBC (link below) where DiD claimed that 79% of these disabled people supported AS. The exact question asked is not available currently.

Two of these polls with such different results (DiD 2014, Scope 2011) were considered within professional journalism from a trusted source, the BBC, which dug below the conflicting claims to look at the risks. For example:

"Pam's case also throws up the dangers of diagnoses. She was diagnosed with [motor neuron disease], a severely life-shortening condition for most people, but 20 years later she's still watching films and box-sets (she's currently obsessed with True Detective), reading books and asking me for smoothie recipes."

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-ouch-28311809> (17 July 2014)

2011

A Scope survey in 2011 found that 70% of 500 disabled people (350) were concerned about any changes in the law.

This link and extract is professional press coverage at the time:

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/8501306/Allowing-assisted-suicide-would-pressurise-disabled-to-kill-themselves.html>

(9 May 2011)

Extract:

[A] new poll found 70 per cent of disabled people were concerned that such a reform would create pressure on vulnerable patients to “end their lives prematurely”.

The survey for Scope, the leading disability charity, also found 3 per cent of the 500 disabled people questioned in the ComRes poll feared that they would personally come under pressure to commit suicide if the law were changed. ...

Richard Hawkes, chief executive of Scope, said: “Assisted suicide is a complex and emotional issue, and there are loud and passionate voices on both sides of the debate.

“But while high profile lawyers, doctors and celebrities ... grab the headlines, the views of the thousands of ordinary disabled people who could be affected by this issue are rarely listened to.”

New research: Majority of disabled people fear change to assisted suicide law

17 July 2014

Most disabled people are concerned about a change in the law on assisted suicide, with many fearing that it could lead to disabled people being pressured into ending their lives prematurely, according to a new poll [1].

The survey, commissioned by disability charity Scope, shows that the majority of disabled people – including three-quarters (72%) of young disabled people [2] – are concerned about moves to legalise assisted suicide.

Scope commissioned the poll ahead of a debate about Lord Falconer's Assisted Dying Bill in the House of Lords today.

It reveals that nearly twice as many disabled people would be concerned by a change in law (64%), as those who would not (36%) [3].

Nearly two-thirds (62%) of those who are concerned about a change in the law said that they were worried that it would lead to pressure being placed on disabled people to end their lives prematurely.

The majority (55%) of disabled people surveyed believe that the current ban on assisted suicide protects vulnerable people from pressure to end their lives.

Scope has come out strongly against the legalisation of assisted suicide.

The charity believes that a change in the law reinforces a view that it's 'better to be dead than be disabled', and could lead to disabled people feeling under pressure to end their lives.

The Bill being proposed claims to be 'just for people with six months to live' but Scope argues that this definition is vague and would include many disabled people, including those with long-term and degenerative conditions.

In a [joint letter to peers](#), Scope, Action on Elder Abuse, Mencap and the Veteran's Association, have raised serious concerns about Lord Falconer's Assisted Dying Bill and the impact that a change in law would have on disabled people and other vulnerable people.

The letter follows [warnings earlier this week](#) from Dutch euthanasia expert Professor Theo Boer, that legalising assisted suicide in Holland has been a slippery slope towards the widespread premature deaths of disabled, ill and older people.

[The Prime Minister also restated his opposition to the change in the law](#) during PMQ's this week, saying he worried about "legalised euthanasia".

Richard Hawkes, CEO of disability charity Scope says:

"Many disabled people are really worried about a change in the law on assisted suicide.

They are concerned that it will lead to disabled people, and other vulnerable people, feeling under pressure to end their lives.

Why is it that when people who are not disabled want to commit suicide, we try to talk them out of it, but when a disabled person wants to commit suicide, we focus on how we can make that possible?

The campaign to legalise assisted suicide reinforces deep-seated beliefs that the lives of disabled people are not worth as much as other people's.

It's a view that is all too common.

The current law against assisted suicide works. It sends a powerful message countering the view that if you're disabled it's not worth being alive, and that you're a burden.

Many disabled people strongly oppose a change in the law."

The poll of 1005 disabled people in the UK, which was conducted by Opinium Research, reveals that:

- The majority of disabled people (64%) – including nearly three-quarters (72%) of young disabled people – are concerned about moves to legalise assisted suicide
- Nearly two thirds (62%) of disabled people concerned about a change in the law worry that pressure would be put on disabled people to end their lives prematurely
- The majority (55%) of disabled people are concerned that if assisted suicide was legalised in the UK, disabled people might choose it in order not to be a burden on family, friends, or caregivers
- The majority of disabled people (55%) believe that the current ban on assisted suicide protects vulnerable people from pressure to end their lives.

The survey also explored the way that society views disabled people:

- Two-thirds (65%) of those surveyed - and three-quarters (76%) of young disabled people - believe that disabled people are often seen by the public as a burden to society
- Three in five (59%) said that disabled people's lives are generally not valued as much as other people's
- Two-thirds (66%) said that people tend to assume that disabled people don't have a good quality of life
- Three-quarters (76%) of 18 – 34 year olds have experienced someone explicitly making negative assumptions or comments about their quality of life, due to their disability.

For interviews and background please contact ... in the Scope press office on 020 7619 7201 or p...@scope.org.uk

ENDS

[1] Opinium research conducted an online survey of 1,005 disabled UK adults aged 18 and over between 7th and 11th July 2014

[2] Disabled UK adults aged between 18 and 34

[3] These percentages were calculated from those who provided a response and excludes the 5% of respondents who selected 'prefer not to say'

Notes to editors

Opinium Research carried out an online survey of 1,005 UK disabled adults from the 7 to 11 of July 2014. www.opinium.co.uk

Types - [assisted](#), [attitudes](#), [die](#), [disability](#), [disabled](#), [dying](#), [Scope](#), [suicide](#)