

Latest UK opinion poll

On 28th October 2002 an NOP public opinion poll asked:

“Do you think that a person who is suffering unbearably from a terminal illness should be allowed by law to receive medical help to die, if this is what they want, or should the law not allow them to receive this medical help to die?”

81% replied that **“Yes, the law should allow them to receive medical help to die.”**

12% replied that **“No, the law should not allow them to receive medical help to die.”**

6% said they **“Don't know.”**

Progress in hygiene and medical techniques over the last 100 years has facilitated a remarkable extension of life. However, for some people medical advances have led to a drawing out of the dying process and additional suffering at the end of life. High-profile cases such as those of Diane Pretty and Reginald Crew have helped raise awareness of the problems faced by terminally ill people who want the option of medical help to die, and as a result a large majority of people in the UK and around the world support a change in the law so that they can have this choice.

UK

The 1996 British Social Attitudes Survey¹ reported that 82% of the British population thought an individual should have the right to ask a doctor to end their life if they are suffering from an incurable and painful disease.

- This was an increase from the 75% reported in 1984 and the 79% reported in 1989.
- Gender, age and economic class make little difference to people's views on the subject.
- People with a disability are more likely to support assisted dying – the report's authors

suggested a possible explanation for this is that disabled people are more inclined to empathise with people who are in pain and suffering.

Among religious groups there is widespread support for assisted dying. While some religious leaders and official doctrines do not agree people should be allowed to choose to end their lives, most believers think the choice should rest with the individual concerned.

- A 1993 NOP poll reported that 83% of Protestants, 73% of Roman Catholics and 60% of Jews surveyed were in favour of medical aid in dying.

Rest of the world

Throughout the world there is clear public backing for allowing people who are suffering unbearably from terminal illnesses to choose how and when they die.

Australia

- Morgan Gallup's independent opinion polls have consistently shown that a large majority of Australians are in favour of assisted dying.
- In 1995 78% agreed that terminally ill adults should be allowed the choice of medical assistance to die.

France

- IFOP poll from April 2001: **“Some people suffering unbearably from incurable illnesses ask doctors for euthanasia – the doctors put an end to their lives without their suffering. Do you think French law should authorise doctors to peacefully end the lives of people who suffer unbearably from incurable illnesses and request this?”**
- 38% answered ‘Yes absolutely’ and 50% of those questioned answered ‘Yes in certain circumstances’ making a total of 88% support for assisted dying in certain circumstances.

Belgium

- An INRA poll, March 2001 asked 2000 people if legal proposals being considered by the Belgian Parliament which would decriminalise assisted dying within certain safeguards were a good idea.
- 72% answered 'Yes', 18% 'No', and 10% responded that they did not know.

Germany

- A FORSA poll in April 2001 asked 1000 people whether there should be legal regulation of assisted dying for terminally ill people, allowing them to request medical help to end their life.
- 75% answered 'Yes'.
- The percentage of those saying 'Yes' by religious denomination was as follows:

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|-------------|-----|
| Catholic | 69% |
| Evangelical | 74% |
| no religion | 86% |

Italy

- In Italy, a recent opinion poll put support for a change in the law to allow assisted dying at 75%.

The Netherlands

- A 2001 NIPO poll revealed 85% public support for legalisation of assisted dying.

Spain

- In January 2002, the United Consumers Organisation published a poll stating that 70% of the population was in favour of the legalisation of medically assisted dying.

USA

- A 1996 Gallup opinion poll showed 75% of Americans agree with terminally ill patients having the option of assisted dying.

¹ Donnison D and Bryson C, (1996), Matters of life and death: attitudes to euthanasia, in Howell R, Curtice J, Park A, Brook L and Thomson K (eds), *British Social Attitudes: the 13th report*, SCPR: Dartmouth.