

Attitudes towards “suicide as a right” and physician-assisted suicide among staff in long-term care for older adults in Sweden.

13. Vulnerable groups

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Abstract text

Background: Little is known about care providers' attitudes to suicide and physician-assisted suicide.

Aim: In the context of possible future legalization of medical aid in dying in Sweden, it is essential to examine attitudes towards “suicide as a right” and physician-assisted suicide among care staff working in home- and long-term care.

Method: Staff from facilities in the western part of Sweden anonymously completed the “Attitudes Towards Suicide” (ATTS) questionnaire. Proportions were aggregated for responses “strongly agree” and “agree”.

Results: Results are based on data from staff in home- and long term care (n=733, 87% women). One fifth agreed to “people do have the right to take their own lives” and a quarter to “suicide is an acceptable means to terminate an incurable disease”. Eighteen percent agreed to “there may be situations where the only reasonable resolution is suicide”. Six out of ten responded positively to “I can understand that people suffering from a severe, incurable disease commit suicide” as well as “a person suffering from a severe, incurable disease expressing wishes to die should get help to do so”. Further, 30% responded positively to the statement “I would consider the possibility of taking my life if I were to suffer from a severe, incurable disease” and 36% to “I would like to get help to take my life if I were to suffer from severe, incurable, disease”. When asked if “physician-assisted suicide for should be legalized in Sweden”, 27% responded either “in all cases” or “in almost all cases”.

Conclusion: Two-thirds agreed that they understand that people with severe disease take their lives and that they should get help to die but only one quarter actually supported the legalization of physician-assisted suicide. Findings reflect the gap between opinions, preparedness to act and law, demonstrating the complexity of these issues.