



Faculty of Medicine and Health

**KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS EUTHANASIA AMONG
UNIMAS UNDERGRADUATE NURSING STUDENTS**

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UNIMAS UNDERGRADUATE NURSING STUDENTS

This project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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
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Al-fatihah, Abdul Rahman bin Razali and Ranah binti Roseri.

ABSTRACT

Euthanasia is a controversial and ethically debated topic in recent years, stirring intense discussion and moral dilemmas in the medical field. This study aims to assess the knowledge and attitude towards euthanasia amongst Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) undergraduate nursing students as well as to examine the association between knowledge and attitude towards euthanasia. 148 undergraduate nursing students of UNIMAS had participated in a survey where they were required to complete an online self-questionnaire encompassing sociodemographic characteristics, knowledge and attitude towards euthanasia. Descriptive statistics & inferential analysis were used to analyze the data.

The results revealed that 78.4% of participants possessed a good knowledge regarding euthanasia. However, more than half of the participants (50.7%) exhibited poor attitude towards euthanasia. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening education and providing ethical guidance to nursing students, as they are future nurses who, in the course of their clinical practice, will inevitably encounter morally challenging situations that call for their best moral judgment. The study emphasizes the need for appropriate and targeted interventions to promote understanding and fostering empathetic decision-making skills in sensitive domain of moral ethical issues. By addressing these aspects, healthcare institutions can effectively equip nursing professionals to navigate complexities and intricacies of moral ethical issues, thus ensuring optimal patient care and ethical practice.

Keywords: knowledge, attitude, euthanasia, nursing students, Malaysia

ABSTRAK

Eutanasia merupakan topik yang menimbulkan kontroversi dan hangat diperdebatkan sejak akhir-akhir ini. Isu ini telah mencetuskan dilema dalam aspek moral lebih-lebih lagi dalam bidang perubatan. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menilai tahap pengetahuan dan sikap terhadap eutanasia dalam kalangan pelajar sarjana muda kejururawatan di Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) serta membahas perkaitan antara pengetahuan dan sikap keterbukaan terhadap isu ini. Satu tinjauan melalui ujian kaji selidik di atas talian telah dijalankan ke atas 148 pelajar sarjana muda kejururawatan di UNIMAS, yang merangkumi soalan-soalan berkaitan ciri-ciri sosiodemografi, tahap pengetahuan dan sikap terbuka peserta terhadap eutanasia. Penganalisisan data telah dilaksanakan melalui kaedah stastikal deskriptif dan analisis inferensi.

Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa 78.4% peserta memiliki pengetahuan yang baik terhadap isu eutanasia ini. Walau bagaimanapun, lebih separuh daripada jumlah peserta (50.7%) menunjukkan sikap yang kurang baik terhadap eutanasia. Hasil kajian membuktikan betapa pentingnya pengukuhan dalam aspek pendidikan dan pemupukan nilai serta bimbingan etika dalam bidang kejururawatan khususnya, melihatkan kepada kebarangkalian yang tinggi untuk mereka menghadapi situasi yang lebih kompleks yang memerlukan pertimbangan moral terbaik di masa hadapan. Kajian ini menekankan kepentingan dalam mempersiapkan usaha yang sesuai dan berterusan serta ampuh untuk meningkatkan pengetahuan dan daya fikir sekali gus memupuk sifat empati menangani isu-isu sensitif yang berkait rapat dengan aspek etika dan moral. Justeru itu, institusi kesihatan sewajarnya cakna akan aspek-aspek yang berkaitan agar dapat mempersiapkan bakal jururawat bersedia secara holistik dalam menangani situasi kompleks khususnya dalam aspek etika dan moral di masa hadapan selain memastikan kualiti rawatan yang optimum dan penuh etika kepada para pesakit khususnya.

Kata kunci: pengetahuan, sikap, eutanasia, pelajar kejururawatan, Malaysia

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

UNIMAS	Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
FMHS	Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter describes this study's background, problem statements, research questions, objectives of this study, significance of this study, definition of terms as well as summary of the chapter.

1.1 Background of Study

In recent years, euthanasia has been one of the most intriguing and yet, controversial ethical debates in contemporary health care nowadays with an increasing aging population and advances in medical technology. According to Zerwekh and Graneau in 2017, euthanasia is derived from the Greek word which directly translated to 'good death'; *eu* means good and *thanatos* means death. Euthanasia is also popularly known as 'mercy killing'. Zerwekh and Garneau (2017) refer euthanasia as "painless actions to end the life of someone suffering from incurable or terminal disease." Euthanasia can be categorized into a few categories such as active and passive, or voluntary and involuntary. Active euthanasia involves commission to terminate a patient's life, for instance using lethal injection whereas for passive euthanasia involves omission of current ongoing treatment, i.e. withdrawal or withholding artificial life support such as nasogastric feeding and ventilator. Voluntary euthanasia is defined as a patient's request to terminate their life with the help of the physician meanwhile as for involuntary euthanasia is defined as termination of the patient's life without their knowing and consent (Naseh & Heidari, 2017).

In the modern healthcare setting nowadays, death is no longer a definitive matter as advances in medical technologies, and scientific breakthroughs have helped to prolong life. However, at the same time, it also has created shades of grey between life and death. For instance, patients who are in a persistent vegetative state or on life support can live longer even though their cognitive and sensory functions are no longer functioning.

Hence, concerns regarding extending life and sufferings of patients have contributed to the endless debates about the practice of euthanasia in healthcare settings. Various views and opinions on euthanasia have cut across complex and dynamic aspects such as legal, politic, health, religious, ethical, social and cultural aspects of the society and influences the acceptance of euthanasia in the society (Kamalruzaman et al., 2022). These debates also revolve around the principles of patient autonomy, doctrine of sanctity of life, social and religious beliefs in determining whether it is morally or legally appropriate to practice euthanasia even with the patient's request. This leads to ethical dilemmas which makes it difficult for the health workers to make a decent and appropriate decision making over such issues. Hence, as a future nurse who may face many novel and evolving ethical dilemmas, especially regarding a patient's request for euthanasia, the level of knowledge and attitudes of nursing students on euthanasia are absolutely crucial and should be taken into account.

1.2 Statement of Problem

For the past few decades, concerns regarding ethical issues in healthcare have soared for various reasons, including euthanasia. In spite of the fact that euthanasia is commonly discussed in the courts as well as among the health care professionals, this particular issue is rarely discussed among nursing students (Karaahmetoglu & Kutahyalioğlu, 2017). This could lead to the scarcity of knowledge and poor attitude towards euthanasia that prevails among university students. This has been concluded in a study by Rios-González et al (2018), they found out that 53% of medical students aged 20 to 24 years old were unaware of the term 'euthanasia'. Given the fact that the students are majoring in health sciences but had no proper education on euthanasia, it shows that there are significant disparities in knowledge regarding euthanasia.

Another study also revealed that almost a third of nursing students from Ozcelick et al.'s (2014) study had poor attitudes towards euthanasia, but less than a half had no opinion either way regarding euthanasia. Apart from that, there are little studies found pertaining to Malaysian nursing students' knowledge and attitude towards euthanasia.

1.3 Research Questions and Research Objectives

1.3.1 Research Questions

- What is the level of knowledge regarding euthanasia among UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students?
- What is the level of attitude towards euthanasia among UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students?
- Is there any association between knowledge and attitude toward euthanasia among UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students?

1.3.2 Research General Objective

- To examine the association between knowledge and attitude towards euthanasia among UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students.

1.3.3 Research Specific Objectives

- To assess the level of knowledge regarding euthanasia among UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students.
- To assess the level of attitude towards euthanasia among UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students.
- To examine the association between the level of knowledge and attitude towards euthanasia among UNIMAS undergraduate nursing students.

1.4 Significance of study

The study provides insight into how personal beliefs and ethical consideration influence the development of attitudes towards euthanasia, contributing to ethical decision-making processes in healthcare settings. This knowledge will aid healthcare professionals in providing patient-centered care and engaging in informed discussions with patients and their families regarding moral ethical choices.

The study will provide valuable insights into contributing factors that shape one's knowledge and attitudes towards euthanasia. By understanding the level of knowledge of one possesses about euthanasia, healthcare professionals can identify area where educational interventions may be necessary. Besides, this study will aid the nursing administrators as well as universities to enhance important educational highlights and modify the nursing curricula to provide the students with necessary information on ethical issues, especially euthanasia.

Moreover, most of the studies were mainly focused on the medical and law students, physicians, registered nurses or other healthcare professionals, instead of nursing students. Therefore, this study will serve as a source for future research that focused on nursing students' knowledge and attitudes towards euthanasia, particularly in Malaysia.

1.5 Definition of Terms

The following terms below were defined for the purpose of this study:

1.5.1 Knowledge

Conceptual definition: “Understanding of or information about a subject that you get by experience or study” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

Operational definition: In this study, knowledge will be assessed using a structured knowledge questionnaire on euthanasia, adapted from Portilla et al (2021). This section requires the respondents to answer 5 multiple choice questions with 4 questions that require the respondents to answer either “Yes” and “No. One of the questions aims to ascertain the correct definition that related to euthanasia. The score will be calculated to categorize into 2 groups: poor knowledge level and good knowledge level. Those who answers the correct definition in relation to euthanasia will be considered to possess good knowledge on euthanasia.

1.5.2 Attitude

Conceptual definition: “The way you feel about something or someone, or a particular feeling or opinion” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.)

Operational definition: In this study, attitude will be assessed using the Attitude Towards Euthanasia (ATE) scale questionnaire, adopted from Wasserman et al in 2005 which consists of a 10-item questionnaire. This section will be measured using a five-point Likert Scale with a total score of 50. The score will then be calculated to form the 2 categories which are positive attitude and negative attitude.

1.5.3 Undergraduate

Conceptual definition: “A student who is studying for their first degree at a college or university in the nursing programme.” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

Operational definition: Undergraduate students in this study refers to the students who are actively enrolling into a degree programme in UNIMAS during the semester at a point of data collection.

1.5.4 Euthanasia

Conceptual definition: The act or practice of killing or permitting the death of hopelessly sick or injured individuals (such as persons or domestic animals) in a relatively painless way for reasons of mercy” (Merriam-Webster, 2022).

Operational definition: Euthanasia in this study refers to a practice that intentionally ends one’s life, with the individual's request, in order to alleviate their pain and sufferings.

1.6 Summary

This chapter discusses the study's background, the problem statement, which describes how there has been a lack of research done on the knowledge and attitude toward euthanasia among nursing students in Malaysia as well as the study's objectives and research questions. This chapter also discusses the objectives and significance of conducting this research. The following chapter will concentrate on the literature review conducted in relation to this study.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter present the relevant literature that provides an overview on this study's research problems and objectives. This literature review aims to critically assess the level of knowledge and attitude towards euthanasia among Malaysian nursing students as well as to identify the association between these two variables. Several journals and articles were obtained using few famously used online databases, for instance, Google Scholar, PubMed, Medline and ResearchGate. A set of keywords, "knowledge", "attitude", "euthanasia", "students", "nursing" and "Malaysia" were used. Few keywords combination used are as: ("Knowledge and Attitude" "AND" "Euthanasia" "AND" "Students"); ("Knowledge and Attitude" "AND" "Euthanasia" "AND" "Nursing Students"); ("Knowledge and Attitude" "AND" "Euthanasia" "AND" "Malaysia"); ("Knowledge and Attitude" "AND" "Euthanasia" "AND" "Students" "OR" "Malaysia").

2.1 Level of knowledge on euthanasia

Studies examining the level of knowledge on the topic euthanasia are extensively conducted among healthcare personnel and students, such as medical and nursing students. In a study conducted in 2019, Yildirim reported that senior nursing students in Turkey had a high level of knowledge about euthanasia with 97.7% out of 300 study samples randomly selected from the study population (N=470), claiming that they were aware of euthanasia. 84.7% of them were able to distinguish the differences between active and passive euthanasia.

In a study carried out among health profession students of Colleges of King Saud Bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences (KSAU-HS), Jeddah Campus, the results revealed that generally, health profession students were aware of the term and concept of euthanasia with 57.1% of them affirmed that they had heard of euthanasia and 65.1% were able to identify the definition of euthanasia correctly.

Similar findings were found in a study by Bulut in 2018. Bulut (2018) conducted a study in order to assess the current knowledge, attitudes and beliefs towards euthanasia among students who are studying in the elderly care department of Vocational School of Health Services in Bingol University. Bulut found out that 75.2% of the students stated their knowledge level on euthanasia were sufficient and 88.9% of them were able to identify the term euthanasia.

Upon reviewing these three research papers, it can be concluded that most students who major in health sciences have a good knowledge level on euthanasia. This is due to the fact that their college-level curricula may include euthanasia in their syllabus. This has been proven in Yildirim's (2019) study, 88.7% of nursing students stated that they had received information about euthanasia from the university. In addition, 89.7% of students participating in Bulut's (2018) study also claimed that they have learnt euthanasia during their school education.

Nonetheless, there are limited studies examining the knowledge of euthanasia among nursing students, especially in Malaysia. This shows that there needs to be emphasis on the formal and informal education regarding euthanasia in order to prepare nursing students with trivial ethical issues and questions that they may face during their clinical practicum.

2.2 Attitude towards euthanasia

There are plenty of studies found investigating the attitude towards euthanasia among healthcare personnel and healthcare students, especially nursing students. In a study done by Ovayolu (2021) exploring the attitudes of nursing and medical students towards euthanasia in Turkey, both medical and nursing students displayed negative attitudes towards euthanasia. It also had been determined in the same study that the majority of the students were against euthanasia for themselves and their relatives (Ovayolu, 2021).

The findings were found in line with a 2017 study conducted in Turkey by Karaahmetoglu & Kutahyalioğlu. They found out that 73.2% of the Turkish University students who participated in their study had poor attitudes towards euthanasia as they said they do not approve the practice of euthanasia. This can be proven with the results shown in the same study whereby 44.1% of the students were against the statements, “I think that practices (euthanasia) for survival of a patient suffering from deadly disease are unnecessary,” and 46.4% of them claimed they were against the statement that said “I think that the practice mentioned in the previous question (euthanasia) is ethically and morally proper (Karaahmetoglu & Kutahyalioğlu, 2017).

Likewise, in Sudan, a study done among final year Khartoum University medical students, analyzing their attitudes towards euthanasia. In the study, the findings reported that 76.6% of the students had unfavourable attitudes towards euthanasia (Ahmed & Kheir, 2006). The students were also against the practice and legalization of euthanasia (Ahmed & Kheir, 2006).