

Oral Presentations

171 THE 'WISH TO DIE' AMONGST OLDER PEOPLE IN IRELAND IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DYING WITH DIGNITY BILL

R. Briggs, M. Ward, R.A. Kenny
The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing, Dublin, Ireland

Background: 'Wish to Die' (WTD) involves thoughts of or wishes for one's own death or that one would be better off dead.

Assisted dying is the act of deliberately providing medical assistance to another person who wishes to end their own life. Currently, in Ireland, it is illegal to provide such assistance to people with WTD or suicidal ideation. However, a new bill that would legalise assisted dying for those with terminal illnesses, the Dying with Dignity Bill 2020, is due to be considered by lawmakers in Ireland in the coming months.

In order to inform discussion around this complex issue, we examine the prevalence and longitudinal course of WTD in a large population-representative sample of older people.

Methods: To define WTD, participants were asked: 'In the last month, have you felt that you would rather be dead?'

Depressive symptoms were measured using the CES-D.

Mortality data were compiled by linking administrative death records to individual-level survey data from the study.

Results: At Wave 1, 3.5% of participants (279/8,174) reported WTD. Both persistent loneliness (OR 5.73 (95% CI 3.41–9.64)) and depressive symptoms (OR 6.12 (95% CI 4.33–8.67)) were independently associated with WTD.

Of participants who first reported WTD at Wave 1 or 2, 72% did not report WTD when reassessed after 2 years, and the prevalence of depressive symptoms (–44%) and loneliness (–19%) was more likely to decline in this group at follow-up.

Fifteen per cent of participants expressing WTD at Wave 1 died during a 6-year follow-up. **Conclusion:** WTD amongst community-dwelling older people is frequently transient and is strongly linked with the course of depressive symptoms and loneliness.

An enhanced focus on improving access to mental health care and addressing social isolation in older people should therefore be a public health priority, particularly in the current context of the Covid-19 pandemic.