

Fatally Flawed: Normalizing Suicide

Proponents of physician-assisted suicide (PAS) avoid the phrase “assisted suicide” and increasingly suggest diluted phrases like “medical aid in dying” or “death with dignity.” But the reality remains – whether a person is four decades or four days from death, the act of self-administering poison with the purpose of ending one’s life is suicide. When a physician provides the means for that act, it becomes PAS.

Humans naturally recoil at suicide. In the tragic instances where it occurs, we typically speak as if the victim was not thinking clearly – “They weren’t themselves.” Yet, in the case of PAS, where victims suffer from terminal disease, mounting medical bills, possible cognitive decline, and the fear of burdening loved ones, advocates claim these individuals are paragons of lucid self-determination. This seems an apparent contradiction; either both are tragedies, or both are victories.

In normalizing PAS, we normalize suicide. This raises a host of issues:

1. Suicide becomes an alternative to compassionate care

If we adopt suicide as a social norm, then we remove any motivation to try and correct the increasing rate of suicide in the country because it is no longer a problem worth fixing, but rather a “solution” worth celebrating and promoting.

2. Suicide is increasing dramatically in the United States

In a study done by Gonzalo Martinez-Ales et al, the rate of suicides from 1999 to 2016 [increased](#)¹ 30%.

According to the CDC, [millions of people attempt suicide, plan an attempt to commit suicide, or seriously contemplated suicide every year](#)².

3. Suicide is contagious

[A Columbia University study](#)³ found that “proximity or familiarity with persons who have ideated, attempted, or died of suicide can induce suicidal ideation or attempts among susceptible individuals,” and further, “knowledge of a suicide attempt has been shown to lead to emotional distress and greater likelihood of suicidal symptoms, regardless of external controls.”

Suicide is especially contagious among autistic people, who are [seven times more likely to commit suicide than those without autism](#)⁴, and who tend to struggle with fixation.

4. People change their minds

[Nine out of ten people](#)⁵ who attempt suicide and survive will not go on to die by suicide at a later date.

5. We’re following Hollywood

For decades, Hollywood has been putting out movies that celebrate and normalize suicide, euthanasia, and assisted suicide, to include *Me Before You*, *Million Dollar Baby*, and *The Room Next Door*.

6. In one state, 988; in another, assisted suicide

In states where PAS is illegal, expressing a desire for suicide immediately generates a call to the national 988 suicide hotline; in PAS states, it kicks off the assisted suicide triage process.

A review of 2020-2025 data from the 11 states with legalized PAS reveals at least 2 of them provided PAS for non-terminal conditions like anorexia and diabetes.

7. Suicide Undermines Human Dignity

If our culture no longer agrees that it's wrong to celebrate and encourage suicide, what does that do to our shared conception of human dignity?

“By the age of five I took my own dying by suicide into consideration... [My father] died by suicide when I was 14... I was completely fine with it.”

– Florian Willet, Co-President of The Last Resort, one of the most prominent assisted suicide and euthanasia advocacy organizations in the world.

1

[https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8699163/#:~:text=However%2C%20from%201999%20to%202016%2C%20suicide%20rates%20increased%20by%2030%25%20in%2044%20of%2050%20US%20states%20and%20across%20every%20age%20group%2C%20though%20most%20dramatic%20increments%20were%20observed%20in%20men%20aged%2045%20to%2064%20\(Stone%20et%20al.%202018\).](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8699163/#:~:text=However%2C%20from%201999%20to%202016%2C%20suicide%20rates%20increased%20by%2030%25%20in%2044%20of%2050%20US%20states%20and%20across%20every%20age%20group%2C%20though%20most%20dramatic%20increments%20were%20observed%20in%20men%20aged%2045%20to%2064%20(Stone%20et%20al.%202018).)

2

<https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/index.html#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20people%20who%20think%20about%20or%20attempt%20suicide%20is%20even%20higher.%20In%202022%2C%20an%20estimated%2013.2%20million%20adults%20seriously%20thought%20about%20suicide%2C%203.8%20million%20planned%20a%20suicide%20attempt%2C%20and%201.6%20million%20attempted%20suicide.>

3

<https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.adq4074#:~:text=proximity%20to%20or%20familiarity%20with%20persons%20who%20have%20ideated%2C%20attempted%2C%20or%20died%20of%20suicide%20can%20induce%20suicidal%20ideation%20or%20attempts%20among%20susceptible%20individuals.>

4 [https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/improving-care/nccmh/suicide-prevention/workshops-\(wave-4\)/wave-4-workshop-2/suicide-and-autism---slides.pdf?sfvrsn=bf3e0113_2#:~:text='Suicide%20in%20Autism%20is%20a%20hidden%20crisis%E2%80%A6'&text=overlooked%20by%20policy%20makers%2C%20clinicians,suicide%20than%20the%20general%20population.](https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/improving-care/nccmh/suicide-prevention/workshops-(wave-4)/wave-4-workshop-2/suicide-and-autism---slides.pdf?sfvrsn=bf3e0113_2#:~:text='Suicide%20in%20Autism%20is%20a%20hidden%20crisis%E2%80%A6'&text=overlooked%20by%20policy%20makers%2C%20clinicians,suicide%20than%20the%20general%20population.)

5 <https://means-matter.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/survival/#:~:text=Nine%20out%20of%20ten%20people%20who%20attempt%20suicide%20and%200survive%20will%20not%20go%20on%20to%20die%20by%20suicide%20at%20a%20later%20date.>