

# Attitudes on Euthanasia Among U.S. Men and Women

## Research Questions

- Do males differ from females in their attitudes towards euthanasia--whether a person with an incurable disease should be allowed to end their life by painless means?
- Does the gender difference in attitudes toward euthanasia vary by education level?

## Significance

- With new health care technologies, options for the terminally ill have expanded, and people believe deciding to die is not as simple.
- Supporting view: Allowing people to 'die with dignity' is kinder than forcing them to continue their lives with suffering.
- Opposing view: There is a risk of giving doctors the power to decide when a patient's life is not worth living.

## Background

- The traditional image of a female is to be a nurturer and take care of the ill; deliberately killing someone contradicts the role of a caregiver (Nance & Ruby 1996).
- Female physicians and orthodox physicians indicated more conservative views, in part due to factors inherent in subspecialty education. (Levy et al. 2013).
- College education allows for more understanding of the process. (Cohen et al. 2006).

## Hypotheses

- Females are less likely to agree to allowing a patient with an incurable disease to die upon request.
- The gender difference will be less for those with a college degree

## Data and Sample

- The General Social Survey
- 2016 public date (N = 2,867)
- American adults aged 18 and older living in non-institutionalized households who speak English

## Dependent Measures

Attitudes Toward Euthanasia

- Asked about two cases:
  - "When a person has a disease that cannot be cured, do you think doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient's life by some painless means if the patient and their family request it?" (1 = Yes, 0 = No)
  - "Do you think a person has the right to end his or her own life if this person has an incurable disease?" (1 = Yes, 0 = No)

The scale range:

- 0 = Neither cases 20.5%
- 1 = One of the cases 17.8%
- 2 = Both cases 61.7%

## Independent Measure

Gender of the respondent

- Male 44.1%
- Female 55.9%

## Control Measure

Level of Education

- No college degree (0-15 years) 68.8%
- College degree (16-20 years) 31.2%

## Analysis

- Cross tabulation and Chi-square test using GSS

## Results

Figure 1. % Respondents Reporting Attitudes Towards Euthanasia: U.S. Adults With No College Degree.

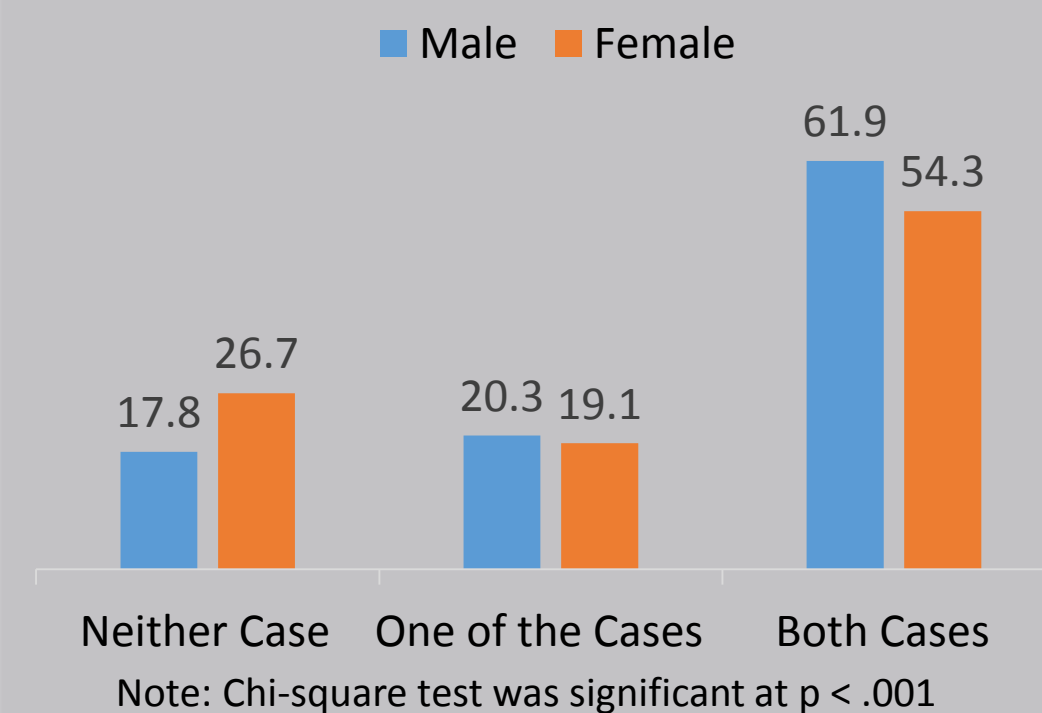
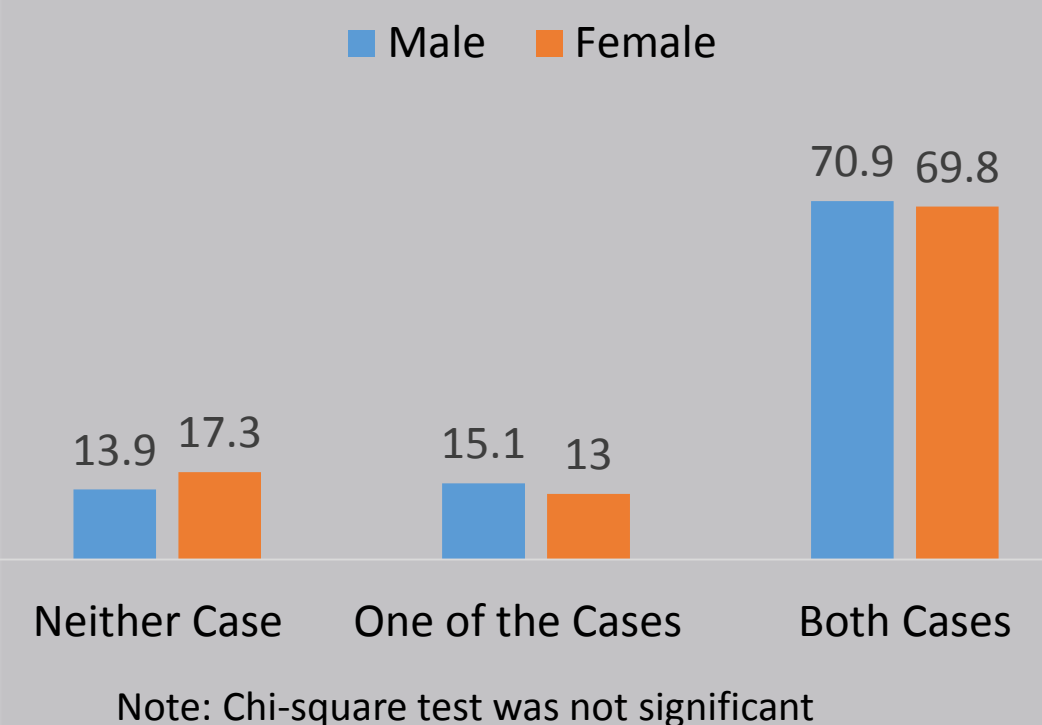


Figure 2. % Respondents Reporting Attitudes Towards Euthanasia: U.S. Adults With a College Degree.



## Summary and Concluding Thoughts

- The majority (61.7%) of U.S. adults support the right to die for both cases.
- Males without a college education are more likely than their female counterparts to report agreeing with allowing incurable patients to die upon request ( $p < .001$ ).
- There is no significant gender difference in attitudes toward euthanasia among those with a college degree.

## Policy Implications

- Those who want to increase support for the legalization of euthanasia in the United States may want to consider how to inform women without a college degree about the issue.

## References

- Cohen, J., Marcoux, I., Bilsen, J., Deboosere, P., van der Wal, G., & Deliens, L. (2006). European public acceptance of euthanasia: socio-demographic and cultural factors associated with the acceptance of euthanasia in 33 European countries. *Social science & medicine*, 63(3), 743-756.
- LEVY, T. B., AZAR, S., HUBERFELD, R., SIEGEL, A. M., & STROUS, R. D. (2013). Attitudes Towards Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide: A Comparison between Psychiatrists and Other Physicians. *Bioethics*, 27(7), 402-408.
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