

## Medical Anthropology (14) Life and death

In some traditional societies, life and death are considered as the result of nature and uncontrollable in general. People felt disappointed at the unwanted loss of life, and sought the relief by cultural mitigation involving various kinds of religion (Kaufman and Morgan 2005, Varisco 2011, Kiong and Sciller 1993).

However, various kinds of abortion and contraception techniques have been widely practiced in many traditional communities (Lans et al. 2018). The timing of acceptance of baby as a new member of the community diversified by culture (Jokic, 2008). As a result, infanticide has been conducted too, which affected sex ratios. Senicide has also been practiced in various societies such as *ubasute* in Japan, which is concurrent issue in India (Sunger, 2020). In this sense, life and death have been intentionally controlled for long time.

With the industrial revolution, especially medical technology and public health, people gradually began to believe that the life and death are controllable. Life at the high risk of death can be saved by medical technology and pharmaceutical treatment, child mortality can be reduced by public health improvement, undesired births can be reduced by induced abortion and contraception, and births from higher age parents can be supported by assisted reproductive technology (ART). It largely affected the views on life and death (Inhorn and Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2008). Prenatal diagnosis caused a new issue whether congenital abnormality can be a reason of induced abortion or not, potentially related to eugenics issue (Raz, 2005).

## &lt;References&gt;

- George SM (2006) Millions of missing girls: from fetal sexing to high technology sex selection in India. *Prenatal Diagnosis*, 26(7): 604-609. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pd.1475>
- Inhorn MC, Birenbaum-Carmeli D (2008) Assisted reproductive technologies and culture change. *Annual Reviews of Anthropology*, 37: 177-196. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.37.081407.085230>
- Jokic Z (2008) Yanomami shamanic initiation: The meaning of death and postmortem consciousness in transformation. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 19(1): 33-59. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1556-3537.2008.00002.x>
- Kaufman SR, Morgan LM (2005) The anthropology of the beginnings and ends of life. *Annual Reviews of Anthropology*, 34: 317-341. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25064888>
- Kiong TC, Schiller AL (1993) The anthropology of death: A preliminary overview. *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, 21(2): 1-9. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24491682>
- Lans C et al. (2018) Herbal fertility treatments used in North America from colonial times to 1900, and their potential for improving the success rate of assisted reproductive technology. *Reproductive Biomedicine & Society Online*, 5: 60-81. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rbms.2018.03.001>
- Raz AE (2005) Disability rights, prenatal diagnosis and eugenics: a cross-cultural view. *Journal of Genetic Counseling*, 14: 183-187. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10897-005-0573-0>
- Simpson B (2018) Death. In: Stein F et al. (Eds.) *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology*. <http://doi.org/10.29164/18death>
- Sunger V (2020) Senicide as a modern problem in India: A Durkheimian perspective of *thalaikoothal*. *Crossing Borders: Students Reflections on Global Social Issues*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.31542/cb.v2i1.1994>
- Varisco DM (2011) The End of Life, The Ends of Life: An Anthropological View. *Journal of the Islamic Medical Association of North America*, 43(3): 203-207. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5915%2F43-7037>

## &lt;Debate theme for next time (21 July 2022)&gt;

As a kind of ultimate choice of life and death, physician assisted death (or euthanasia) became the big issue. There are many opinions and laws related to the physician assisted death in the world as shown in the following URLs.

- <https://yomidr.yomiuri.co.jp/article/20170217-OYTET50020/> (in Japanese)
- <https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/d00644/> (Nippon.com)
- <https://www.waseda.jp/foaw/icl/assets/uploads/2014/05/A02859211-00-000270001.pdf> (Waseda Bull. Comparative Law)
- <https://www.institute-of-mental-health.jp/en/thesis/pdf/thesis-03/thesis-03-08.pdf> (Int. J. Law and Psychiatry)
- [https://www.dyingwithdignity.ca/get\\_the\\_facts](https://www.dyingwithdignity.ca/get_the_facts)
- <https://deathwithdignity.org/learn/death-with-dignity-acts/> (Death with dignity acts)
- <https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/ethics/physician-assisted-suicide> (American Medical Association)
- <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/11/26/us/physician-assisted-suicide-fast-facts/index.html> (CNN)
- <https://aahpm.org/positions/pad> (American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Care)
- <https://www.thehastingscenter.org/briefingbook/physician-assisted-death/> (Hastings Center)
- <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJM199804233381706> (NEJM special article in 1998)
- <https://palliative.stanford.edu/physician-assisted-death/> (Stanford Univ.)
- <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.12486> (Annals NY Acad Sci)

- <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.g4502> (BMJ)
- <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12904-018-0304-6> (BMC Palliative Care)

Considering the discussion ever done, should physician assisted death be legally justified in Japan?

\* Prop side: Yes, as in the Netherlands, Switzerland, or in the 5 states of USA, it should be legally justified in Japan.

\* Opp side: No, it should not be legally justified in Japan.