

Healthcare ethics and religion

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PREFACE

This seminary work deals with ethics in healthcare and religion. Religion seems to play a large role in medical care decisions. Whether it is questions of how it is treated, what it is treated with, and by whom it is treated. Some patients want to blend in with the teachings of their religion and reject certain procedures such as abortion, euthanasia, or organ donation. This paper shows how different religions approach these important issues and sets up explanations to help us understand why this is so.

1 HEALTHCARE ETHICS AND RELIGION

Patient's culture and religion should be morally accepted in healthcare. Communication between doctors and patients and between healthcare staff should attend sensitively to the welfare benefits of religion, belief, and culture. Doctors should respect personal religious and cultural commitments, taking account of their significance for treatment and care preferences. Good doctors understand their own beliefs and those of others. They can understand the importance of religion, belief and culture to patients and colleagues (Hordern, 2016).

1.1 Christianity and healthcare ethics

There are many Christian churches including protestant, catholic or orthodox, but they all have very similar approaches, when it comes to Health ethics. Christianity and health ethics have a lot in common, as in the Middle Ages they were treated in monasteries and then subsequently in hospitals and cared for by nuns. We still have many Christian hospitals in the Czech Republic and around the world.

1.1.1 Christianity and Abortion

Biblical teaching is against abortion because it is the killing of a conceived life. However, most of Christian countries are not religious and it is banned only in Poland, Malta, and Liechtenstein in Europe. (Rachel Cooke, 2022).

Table 1: Christians in favor of legal abortion

Country	Church attending Christians	Non- practicing Christians
Austria	46%	86 %
France	64%	85%
Germany	54%	84%
Italy	47%	79%
Spain	49%	73%
UK	65%	86%

Source: pewresearchcenter.com

Church attending Christians are more likely to support legal abortion and there is a median about 52% in Western Europe. Catholic countries oppose legal abortion and there is

median under 50%, while Protestant countries are more accepting toward this idea. Vast majority of non-practicing Christians are in favor of legal Abortion (Lipka, 2018).

The different situation is in the USA, because The Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade law. It is banned in many states where the Republicans govern, such as Texas, Alabama, or Oklahoma (nytimes.com).

Table 2: US adults who say abortion should be legal/illegal by religion (2022)

	Legal in most/all cases	Illegal in most/all cases
Catholic	56%	42%
Black protestant	66%	28%
White protestant	60%	38%
White evangelical protestant	24%	74%
Unaffiliated	84%	15%

Source: pewresearchcenter.com

About 84% of unaffiliated Americans think that abortion should be legal, as do 66% of Black Protestants, 60% of White Protestants and 56% Catholics. There are about 74% of White evangelical protestants who think that abortion should be illegal in all or most cases (pewresearchcenter.com).

1.1.2 Christianity and Euthanasia

Christians mostly oppose euthanasia. They believe that life is given by God and human beings are made in God's image. We should respect birth and death as part of the life which God has created. Life is a thing of value of itself, and it would be a violation of the law of God and morally unacceptable. It also morally wrong to commit a suicide or help someone to do it. Christians think that the community should provide care for people who are dying and give them the best palliative care (bbc.co.uk.).

1.2 Islam and Healthcare ethics

Medical ethical code is based in Muslim society primarily on Galen's work and the Hippocrates oath. It is also necessary to fit with the ethos of Islam and coincide with the Quran and Sunnah. There are also moral considerations which may require certain clothing such as a headscarf for women or divide rooms by gender. The patient has the right to be well informed to make decisions about his/her treatment. The family plays a big role in the decision-making process as does the patient. This is typical also in other eastern cultures. There are 5 principles in Islamic medical ethics (Woodman, Ali Akbar and Chamsi Pasha):

1. "Fitra" is the first pillar that can be attributed to human nature. In every person there is an innate intuition that can guide him/her what is right and what is wrong. For example, killing a human being is an abominable act.
2. "Aqi" is the second pillar that guide us to think critically and distinguish right from wrong. In Islam, we do have a reason that separates us from animals, and we live in a society that teaches us how to behave.
3. "Wahi" is the last pillar that there is one God, a singular divine being. God sends prophets to carry revelations that are used to direct their life. They should listen to God and their teacher.

1.2.1 Islam and abortion

Muslims regard abortion as wrong and haram (forbidden), but many accept that it may be permitted in certain cases. Most of Muslim countries banned abortions and if they permit it in cases if mother's life is in danger or in a risk of mental or physical health or rape. There are only two countries Tunisia and Turkey which allow women to have an abortion on demand during the first trimester (Tønnessen, 2018).

1.2.2 Islam and euthanasia

Islam is against euthanasia. Muslims believe that all human life is sacred, and it is given by Allah, who chooses how long each person live. People should not decide to end the life (bbc.co.uk).

1.3 Buddhism and Healthcare ethics

The early Buddhist monasteries of India were the place where the most significant development in Indian medicine took place. Buddhist monks and nuns played a great role in the institutionalization of medicine like the Christian monasteries in Middle Ages in Europe. They were involved in the health service and planted herbs on their gardens. They developed their medical skills and healed both physical and mental illnesses. There are Buddhist ethical virtues that includes generosity, kindly speech, helpful action, and impartiality. Buddhists also recommend to practice meditations (Keown, 2008).

1.3.1 Buddhism and abortion

There is no single Buddhist view on abortion, but traditional Buddhists believe that abortion is a murder. They believe that life should not be destroyed and reject the idea of abortion. It is morally not acceptable, because they regard life as starting at conception. Buddhists believe in a cycle of birth, death and rebirth and they regard the moment of conception as the beginning of the life of an embodied individual.

The Dalai Lama has said: *“Of course, abortion, from a Buddhist viewpoint, is an act of killing and is negative, generally speaking. But it depends on the circumstances. If the unborn child will be retarded or if the birth will create serious problems for the parent, these are cases where there can be an exception. I think abortion should be approved or disapproved according to each circumstance”* (bbc.co.uk).

1.3.2 Buddhism and euthanasia

The teachings of the Buddha don't explicitly deal with it, but there is a negative view on euthanasia and most Buddhists are against it. Buddhists believe that voluntary euthanasia is wrong, because it demonstrates that one's mind is in a bad situation and that one has allowed physical suffering to cause mental suffering. Meditation and painkillers should relieve the physical or mental suffering and should avoid thinking about euthanasia.

Buddhism focuses on non-harm and avoiding the ending of life. They regard death as a transition and the deceased person will be reborn to a new life. We don't know what the next life is going to be like, and it depends on karma. If we interfere with life, we can change the karmic balance resulting from the shortened life (bbc.co.uk.).

1.4 Hinduism and Healthcare ethics

Hindu medicine is known as ayurveda, and it means „science of life “. It is derived from Hindu ethical principles of nonharmfulness, the sanctity of all life, the existence of the soul separates from the body and a willingness to accept life’s circumstances as defined by one’s karma and dharma. Ayurveda is a complex of therapies including herbal medicines, special diets, meditation, yoga, massage, laxatives, enema, and medical oils (Hinduismtoday.com).

1.4.1 Hinduism and abortion

There is a principle of ahimsa- of nonviolence in the Hindu medical ethics, which generally oppose abortion except where it is necessary to save mother’s life. Abortion is strongly opposed in the Classical Hindu texts and One text compares abortion to the killing of a priest and there is another text that considers abortion a worse sin than killing one’s parents. A lot of Hindus regard the production of children as a public duty and not an individual choice. There is a cultural preference for sons, and this can lead to abortion to prevent the birth of girl babies that is called female foeticide. However, abortion is banned in India.

Hindus believe in reincarnation, which sees life as a repeating cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Therefore, Hindus are strongly against abortion. (bbc.co.uk).

1.4.2 Hinduism and euthanasia

Hindus believe in the reincarnation of the soul through many lives and not necessarily all humans. The next life is decided on the basis of transitory good or bad actions in the previous life. Most Hindus think that euthanasia is a bad thing because it shortens the natural part of life and thus damages one's karma. Other Hindus believe that euthanasia is impermissible because it violates the teachings of ahimsa (no harm). However, we also find Hindus who agree to euthanasia in case of the end of a painful life, but they are in minority (bbc.co.uk.)

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this term paper is to evaluate medical ethics and religion. Religion plays a large role in health care and in some states or religious communities may decide how one should be treated. However, all religions reject abortion and euthanasia. The most tolerant on these issues are Christian countries, where abortion is allowed, and even most non-practicing Christians agree. In Muslim countries, with the exception of Turkey and Tunisia, abortion is prohibited. In some Buddhist countries abortion is permitted but under strict conditions and in Hindu India only in case of risk to life. Euthanasia is a big sin according to all religions and is allowed only in a few Christian countries and is prohibited in countries where Islam, Buddhism or Hinduism is predominant.

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