



In the Netherlands, on 30 January, a survey was presented with regard to the size and circumstances of the group of people, with a desire to die, who in the eyes of those involved cannot be honored with existing euthanasia legislation.

The research provides a clear insight into the size and characteristics of the group of elderly people who want to die without being seriously ill, and into the circumstances that play a role.

The results of the report are complex because it is difficult to distinguish between the gradations for a death wish. The group of elderly people who are affected is heterogeneous. There is not one simple solution for the problems they are struggling with.

The results of the study show that people aged above 55, who consider their life complete are a small group (0.34%). In addition, the number of people in this group with an active death wish and actually seeking help with suicide is only 0.18%.

So it concerns a small group of elderly people, which does not mean that we do not have to pay attention to it. On the contrary, the suffering of every person requires compassion from society. The group of people who say they have a death wish all their lives (28% of this 0.34 %) should not leave us cold.

Two other results of the study are very relevant to the ethical debate

- A significant group wanders between a death wish and a wish to live. As the research shows, these wishes weigh equally and alternate, and the wish to die itself is first of all a desire not to wake up more than a desire to die. This raises questions about the authenticity of the death wish and its meaning: do these people really want death or do they in fact long for another life?  
Then offering help ending their lives is a one-sided response from society. First the life questions with which this group of elderly people struggle should be answered.
- The factors underlying this wish show that elderly people with a death wish have to cope with, among other things, existential, social and relational problems, in addition to possible health problems, physical and / or mental. It is notable that there is an overrepresentation of women (67%) and people from lower social environments (53%).

So we are really dealing with a social problem that can be solved at a social level: the key to the solution lies in the social and relational relationships.

However, for advocates of euthanasia, the results are enough reason to propose a bill for euthanasia for patients who although they have no physical or psychological problems, feel their life is 'completed'.