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Opinion

Why are suicide rates climbing after years of decline?[†]

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There is evidence that the increasing rates of suicide can be linked to the legalization of physician-assisted suicide. Factors such as suicide contagion and the increasing positive media reporting on such suicides are also relevant and have led to different standards of treatment for suicidal people who claim the right to have their suicides medically assisted.

Keywords: Assisted suicide, Suicide, Law, Ethics, Psychology

After years of declines, the US suicide rate rose 24 percent over fifteen years according to a new report from the US Centers for Disease Control on suicide rates in the US from 1999 through 2014 (Curtin et al. 2016). The suicide rate rose for everyone between the ages of 10 and 74 from 1999 to 2014 (Storrs 2016). National media like the *Wall Street Journal* (McKay 2016) and CNN speculated that the economic downturn, drugs, and lack of mental health resources could be factors in the 24-percent increase. However, one huge factor was totally ignored: the legalization and promotion of physician-assisted suicide.

THE LEGALIZATION OF PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED SUICIDE AND SUICIDE CONTAGION

It must not be dismissed as mere coincidence that the new rise in suicides

correlates to the implementation of the first physician-assisted suicide law in Oregon. A 2012 report on suicide trends and risk factors for the Oregon Health Authority found the state's overall suicide rate had risen 41 percent higher than the national rate (Associated Press 2013). This is the "regular" suicide rate. Physician-assisted suicides are not included.

Since Oregon, four more states (California, Vermont, and Washington) have legalized physician-assisted suicide via legislation with a Montana Supreme Court ruling in favor of assisted suicide but without a regulatory framework (Pro-Con.org 2015). But it is only now that the media is noticing a suicide rate that has been increasing for fifteen years.

There is a well-known and well-recognized suicide contagion effect after reported suicides. Both US media guidelines (Centers for Disease Control 1994) and World Health Organization guidelines (World Health Organization 2008) warn against media glamorization or

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