Symposium | Suicide prevention：[Symposium 88] Euthanasia and Mental Illness: Ethical Dilemmas at the Intersection of Suicide Prevention and Rights Protection

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[Symposium 88] Euthanasia and Mental Illness: Ethical Dilemmas at the Intersection of Suicide Prevention and Rights Protection

Moderator: Itsuo Asai (Heart Clinic Medical Corporation)

[SY-88-03] Mental Vulnerability, Suicidal Ideation, and Euthanasia: The Slippery Slope in Post-COVID Japanese Society

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The presenter conducted the Survey of Views on Life and Death (SoVoLaD) in Japan in 2019 and 2024, each with approximately 1,000 respondents. Previous analyses have revealed a strong positive correlation between support for the legalization of euthanasia or refusal of life-prolonging treatment and suicidal ideation. The 2024 survey included new items on post-COVID mental health, the presence of suicidal ideation, and anxiety about the future. This presentation will examine the correlations between these psychological indicators and attitudes toward euthanasia.

To interpret these findings, it is important to note that psychiatric patients who contracted COVID-19 in Japan exhibited higher mortality rates than the general population. A major contributing factor was the lack of respiratory specialists in psychiatric hospitals. This phenomenon can be understood through the concept of overlapping risks: individuals already facing one form of vulnerability become further stigmatized, exposing them to additional risks and neglect.

In the wake of the pandemic, such overlapping risks appear to have intensified. Introducing Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) under these conditions could initiate a slippery slope, particularly for individuals with psychiatric disorders. Psychiatrists—whose role traditionally includes alleviating suicidal ideation—may instead find themselves legitimizing or even encouraging patients' desire to die. This shift risks producing consequences akin to the euthanasia programs of Nazi Germany—not in intention, but in effect.