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Research and Scholarship for an Informed Social Response to Human Life Questions



A Reflection BY A YOUNG INDIGENOUS WOMAN

It is startling to know that the Government has now drawn a very thin line separating life and death with the implementation of 'Medical assistance in dying' (MAiD), considering the fact that many people today are suffering from mental illnesses that make them question their will to live. "For the First Nations population, suicide rates are twice the national average and show no signs of decreasing."¹ At 6 to 11 times the Canadian average, suicide rates among Inuit are even higher than among First Nations communities.² In Nunavut, rates are so high that 27% of all deaths since 1999 have been suicides.² In addition, these rates are rising over time.² Given this, imagine the impact this law will have on Canada's First Nations population.

Coming from an Indigenous background (Ojibwe First Nations), our people face many difficult obstacles throughout our lives. The same obstacles faced by our ancestors are now passed down to today's society. The legalization of euthanasia has now enabled death to be so easily accessible for those who do not see a point in living; a reality I feel is truly disappointing.

Winnipeg Centre, MP Robert-Falcon Ouellette commented about this issue surrounding euthanasia and the Indigenous community: **"I'm concerned that we haven't thought out the complete ramifications that a decision like this might have on Indigenous communities that seem to be suffering greatly."** He continued, **"this will be a right that will become entrenched and the impacts on vulnerable groups will become entrenched and it's very hard to stop."**³

My people believe that God has brought us into this world, and that we should wait until our time has come and die naturally. We need to protect not only them but all individuals young and old who suffer from mental illnesses against the pressures to commit suicide. On the contrary, we need to encourage Indigenous communities, especially their most vulnerable members, not to question their reason for living. Palliative care is a proven way to treat a suffering patient without killing them. The government should support what works, not what is harmful and places more vulnerable people at risk.



Jade Meawasige is a current grade 11 student attending York Memorial Collegiate Institute. Her future career is in journalism.

Working with the deVeber Institute this year has allowed her to focus on her interests, as well as gather experience for her future job saying,

"The deVeber Institute is a wonderful organization that I think many more people should be aware of in terms of what they research, as they are very controversial yet important issues."

* Image drawn by David Devine, OUHSD Title VII Indian Education, California.

1. Government of Canada. (2006). Aboriginal mental health and well-being. In *The human face of mental health and mental illness in Canada* (Chapter 12). Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada. www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/human-humain06/index-eng.php.

2. Jack Hicks. Statistics on deaths by suicide in Nunavut, 1975-2003 [Presentation]. Nunavut Bureau of Statistics; January, 2004.

3. Hoffman, Kristy. "Robert-Falcon Ouellette questions impact of doctor-assisted dying on Canada's Indigenous Peoples." CBC News [Manitoba] April 15, 2016.

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/robert-falcon-ouellette-doctor-assisted-dying-indigenous-communities-canada-1.3537217>