



THE
NATIONAL
COUNCIL FOR
PALLIATIVE
CARE

DYING MATTERS COALITION –
PUBLIC OPINION ON DEATH
AND DYING

APRIL 2016



METHODOLOGY NOTE

ComRes interviewed 2,085 British adults online between the 15th and 17th of April 2016. Data were weighted to be representative of British adults aged 18+.

GUIDELINES FOR THE PUBLIC USE OF SURVEY RESULTS

ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules (www.britishpollingcouncil.org). This commits us to the highest standards of transparency.

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- The company conducting the research (ComRes)
- The client commissioning the survey
- Dates of interviewing
- Method of obtaining the interviews (e.g. in-person, post, telephone, internet)
- The universe effectively represented (all adults, voters etc.)
- The percentages upon which conclusions are based
- Size of the sample and geographic coverage.

Published references (such as a press release) should also show a web address where full data tables may be viewed, and they should also show the complete wording of questions upon which any data that has entered the public domain are based.

All press releases or other publications must be checked with ComRes before use. ComRes requires 48 hours to check a press release unless otherwise agreed

Objectives

- To support the National Council for Palliative Care in publicising 'Dying Matters Awareness Week'.
- Track key findings from the 2015 research.

Summary

- Two thirds of the British public say they are comfortable discussing dying with family and friends. However, of those tested, dying is one of the topics the British public personally feel least comfortable discussing, with only sex receiving a lower proportion saying they are comfortable discussing.
- There is a significant difference in terms of age, with older adults more comfortable discussing dying than their younger counterparts. This trend is seen across the study, with older adults more comfortable than younger adults with the topic of dying and death in a variety of different ways.
- This data indicates that for the British public, there is a gap between perceptions and individual experience in terms of comfort discussing dying, death and bereavement. While a majority of those surveyed agree that they themselves personally and people they know are comfortable discussing these issues, and have become more so over the last five years, they feel that the British public as a whole is still not comfortable discussing dying and death.
- On preparing for end of life, writing a will is the activity most likely to have been done by an individual or discussed with anyone. The proportions indicating they have completed this activity has remained consistent since first tested in 2015.
- Encouragingly, a majority of British adults disagree that talking about death or making plans such as funeral arrangements could make death happen and disagree that they would not know who to discuss end of life plans with. Half of the public say they would be happy to discuss end of life plans with someone close to them, if asked, and only around a fifth report that this would make them awkward or uncomfortable.
- British adults across age groups disagree with the use of Facebook to share the news of their own dying or the death of someone close to them, with majorities disagreeing that it is the best way, other than family or friends, to share this news.

RESULTS IN DETAIL

Two thirds of the British public (64%) say that they are comfortable discussing dying with family and friends, while three in ten (30%) report that they are uncomfortable.

- Dying is one of the topics the British public feel least comfortable with, of those tested. Sex is the only issue that the public feel less comfortable with; with half of British adults (50%) report feeling comfortable discussing this with friends and family. Immigration is the topic tested which the British public are most comfortable with (85% feel comfortable).
- There is a significant generational gap in terms of comfort in discussing death. Three quarters (76%) of those aged over the age of 65 report that they feel comfortable discussing this issue with family and friends, compared to three in five (59%) of those aged 18 – 24.

Q. How comfortable or uncomfortable do you personally feel discussing the following issues with family and friends?

	NET: Comfortable	NET: Uncomfortable	Don't know	Prefer not to say
Immigration	85%	10%	4%	2%
Politics	82%	11%	5%	2%
Religion	80%	13%	5%	2%
Money	78%	18%	3%	2%
Dying	64%	30%	4%	2%
Sex	50%	44%	4%	3%

Base: All GB adults (n=2,085)

On discussing dying, death and bereavement, there seems to be a gap between perceptions and experience. While around three quarters (73%) say they agree that people in Britain are uncomfortable discussing this issue, only a third (33%) report feeling this way personally.

- While personal feelings of comfort in discussing dying death and bereavement are largely consistent across generations, older Brits are more likely to perceive a discomfort than younger adults. More than four in five (84%) of those aged 65 and over feel people in Britain are uncomfortable discussing these issues, compared to three in five (60%) of 18 – 24 year olds.
- Encouragingly for the NCPC more than three quarters (78%) of the public say that if British people felt more comfortable discussing dying, death and bereavement, it would be easier to have end of life wishes met. The proportion agreeing with this statement has risen by 7% since tested in 2015.
- Around four in five (82%) British adults agree that end of life care for the old and dying should be as much of a priority for the NHS as care for newborn babies, the issue with the highest agreement level of those tested.
- Further down the scale, only half (50%) of the British public agree that those people who are dying in Britain are not treated with dignity and respect by health care professionals. This feeling is significantly strong among older British adults, compared to their younger counterparts. Around three in five (62%) of those aged 65 and over agree with this statement, compared to just over a third (37%) of 18 – 24 year olds.

Q. Thinking about dying, death and bereavement, to what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

	NET: Agree		NET: Disagree		Don't know	Prefer not to say
	2016	2015	2016	2015		
End of life care for older people and people who are dying should be as much of a priority for the NHS as care for newborn babies	82%	N/A	8%	N/A	8%	2%
If people in Britain felt more comfortable discussing dying, death and bereavement, it would be easier to have our end of life wishes met	78%	71%	8%	9%	12%	2%
People in Britain are uncomfortable discussing dying, death and bereavement	73%	72%	14%	12%	11%	2%
I would feel comfortable discussing my end of life care with my GP	67%	N/A	18%	N/A	12%	2%

On the whole, I think that people who are dying in Britain are not treated with dignity and respect by health and care professionals	50%	/	31%	/	16%	3%
If someone close to me were to die, I wouldn't know where to turn for support	36%	/	53%	/	9%	2%
I feel uncomfortable discussing dying, death and bereavement	33%	/	59%	/	6%	2%

Base: All GB adults (n=2,085), All GB adults 2015 (n=2,016).

A third of British adults each say that they have written a will (35%) and registered to become an organ donor or have an organ donor card (33%). These findings are consistent with 2015.

- Perhaps unsurprisingly, older British adults are more likely than their younger counterparts to have done most of the activities, save for asking other family members about their end of life wishes. For example, while three quarters (74%) of those over the age of 65 and half of 55 – 64 year olds (52%) say that they have written a will, this is the case for only 7% of 25 – 34 year olds and very few (1%) of 18 – 24 year olds.
- Three in ten (30%) adults say that they have not done any of the activities tested, an increase of four percentage points since 2015.

Q. Which, if any, of the following have you yourself done?

	2015	2016
Written a will	35%	35%
Registered to become an organ donor or have an organ donor card	32%	33%
Talked to someone about my own end of life wishes	20%* (different wording)	25%
Talked to someone about my funeral wishes	27%*	30%
Asked a family member about their own end of life wishes	18%	25%
Written down any of my wishes or preferences about my future care, should I become unable to make decisions myself	7%	7%
Initiated a conversation with my GP about my end of life wishes	N/A	1%
None of these	26%	30%

Base: All GB adults (n=2,085), All GB adults 2015 (n=2,016).

Alternate wording used in 2015: *Talked to someone about your end of life wishes, Spoken to someone about your funeral wishes*

Of death and dying related topics tested, British adults are most likely to discuss whether they have made a will. Around half (48%) say that they have discussed this with anyone at all, while around three in ten say they have discussed it with their partner (31%) or their parents (28%).

- Following the making of a will, the British public are most likely to discuss their funeral wishes. One in three (29%) say that they have discussed this with their partner, around a fifth (22%) with their parents and 43% say they have discussed it with anyone at all.
- While there are significant differences in the likeliness of different ages and social grades to have told their partners or parents, this is likely to be down to familial situations. For instance, having a partner, or people's parents having passed away.
- The public's discussion of end of life issues has remained broadly consistent since first tested in 2015.

Q. Have you ever discussed any of the following with...?

	Your Partner		Your Parents		Anyone at all	
	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016
Whether they have made a will	27%	31%	27%	28%	51%	48%
Their funeral wishes	26%	29%	19%	22%	47%	43%
The type of care and support they would want at the end of their lives	17%	19%	14%	14%	34%	29%
Their end of life financial preparations	17%	20%	15%	15%	35%	31%
Where they would like to die (e.g. at home, in a hospice, in a hospital, in a care home)	16%	18%	12%	13%	32%	27%
Not applicable	43%	42%	46%	47%	23%	29%
Prefer not to say	17%	13%	17%	13%	16%	12%

Base: All GB adults (n=2,085), All GB adults 2015 (n=2,016).

As in 2015, being pain free and being with your family and friends are ranked as the most important factors in ensuring a 'good death' is possible. A third (32%) rank being pain free as the most important, while one fifth (20%) rank being with your family and friends as most important.

- Also akin to 2015, having your religious / spiritual needs met receives a much higher proportion ranking it as the least important factor than any other factors tested. Nearly two thirds (64%) rank this as the least important factor. No other factor is ranked as the least important by any more than 5% of the public.
- 14% of British adults do not believe a good death is possible, consistent with the 15% who indicated this opinion in 2015.
- Younger British adults place more emphasis on being with family and friends than their older counterparts. Three in ten (31%) rank this as their most important factors, double the proportion of those aged 65+ (15%). Older adults are more likely to place emphasis on retaining their dignity, which 16% rank as the most important factor, compared to 9% of 18 – 24 year olds, and being pain free. A third (34%) of 65+ year olds and 37% of 55 – 64 year olds rank as the most important factor, compared to one in three (29%) 18 – 24 year olds.

Q. Thinking about death, dying and bereavement, please rank the following factors in order of how important they are to you to ensure a 'good death' is possible?

	1 st (Most important)		2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th (Least important)	
	2015	2016					2015	2016
Being pain free	33%	32%	19%	13%	9%	8%	3%	3%
Being with your family and friends	17%	20%	17%	15%	15%	14%	4%	4%
Retaining your dignity	13%	13%	21%	17%	16%	15%	3%	3%
Being cared for and able to die in the place of your choice	6%	7%	14%	19%	19%	21%	5%	6%
Being involved in decisions about your care, or if you are not able to, for family or those close to you to be involved	6%	8%	12%	18%	22%	21%	5%	5%

Having your religious / spiritual needs met	5%	5%	3%	4%	5%	6%	60%	64%
I do not believe a good death is possible (exclusive)	15%	14%						

Base: All GB adults (n=2,085), All GB adults 2015 (n=2,016).

British adults are more likely to agree that they and the people they know have become more comfortable discussing death or dying over the past five years, than they are that British people overall have become more comfortable discussing these issues.

- Around half (52%) agree that over the past five years, they personally have become more comfortable talking about their own death or dying, or that of people close to them, while only a quarter (26%) disagree. More than two in five (43%) agree that people they know have become more comfortable.
- In contrast, just over a third (36%) say that British people overall have become more comfortable talking about their own death or that of someone close to them.
- Perhaps unsurprisingly, older British adults are more likely than their younger counterparts to agree that they themselves, the people they know and the British people overall have more comfortable discussing these issues.
- Respondents in Scotland are more likely to agree they are comfortable discussing these issues than those in England. Three in five (61%) respondents in Scotland say they agree they have become more comfortable talking about their own death or dying or that of people close to them, compared to half (51%) of those in England. This trend is repeated in terms of people they know and British people overall.
- A majority of British adults (55%) say they disagree that everyone in the UK currently has equal access to good quality end of life care, while 25% agree.

Q. To what extent to you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	NET: Agree	NET: Disagree	Don't know	Prefer not to say
Over the past five years, I have become more comfortable talking about my own death or dying, or that of people close to me	52%	26%	17%	4%
Over the past five years, people I know have become more comfortable talking about their own death or the death of someone close to them	43%	27%	26%	4%
Over the past five years, British people overall have become more comfortable talking about their own death or the death of someone close to them	36%	28%	33%	3%
I believe that everyone in the UK currently has equal access to good quality end of life care	25%	55%	17%	3%

Base: All GB adults (n=2,085)

Encouragingly in terms of increasing public engagement with end of life plans, a majority of British adults disagree that talking about death or making plans such as funeral arrangements could make death happen (69% disagree) and that they would not know who to discuss end of life plans with (61%).

- In addition, two thirds (67%) agree that they would be glad to help someone they know organise or record their end of life plans if they were asked.
- Despite this, a significant minority of 18 – 24 year olds (20%) agree that they making plans such as funeral arrangements could make death happen, compared to only 9% of those aged 65 and over.

Q. To what extent to you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	NET: Agree	NET: Disagree	Don't know	Prefer not to say
I would be glad to help someone I know organise or record their end of life plans if asked	67%	14%	15%	4%
Talking or thinking about my end of life planning makes death feel closer	45%	41%	3%	11%
Talking or thinking about my end of life scares me	45%	43%	8%	3%
I don't know where to find information to plan my own, or help someone sort out their own, end of life plans	36%	46%	4%	14%
I believe that some sort of medical breakthrough in the near future will prolong my life far beyond my current life expectancy	25%	47%	3%	25%
I'd like to make my end of life plans but I don't know who among my friends or family I could to discuss it with	19%	61%	15%	4%
I feel that talking about death, or making plans such as funeral arrangements, a will or advance care plan, could make death happen	15%	69%	3%	12%

Base: All GB adults (n=2,085)

Half (50%) of British adults say they would be happy to talk to someone close to them who wishes to discuss end of life wishes. In comparison, only a fifth (21%) say they would feel awkward or uncomfortable.

- Continuing a trend seen across this study, older British adults feel more comfortable. Around two thirds (64%) of those aged 65 and over say they would be happy to talk to the person who wishes to discuss their end of life wishes, compared to just over two in five (43%) 18 – 24 year olds.
- In addition, a quarter (26%) of 18 – 24 year olds say they would feel awkward or uncomfortable, with only 15% of 65+ year olds expressing this opinion.

Q. Which of the following reasons, if any, describe how you would feel discussing the end of life wishes of someone close to you with them?

	%
I would be happy to talk to them	50%
I would consider it a sign of closeness that I was asked	46%
I would feel awkward or uncomfortable	21%
It would make the person's death feel closer	15%
I don't think I would know enough to have an informed discussion	15%
I would not know what to say	15%
None of the above	7%

Base: All GB adults (n=2,085)

British adults are disinclined to share the news of the death or dying of themselves or someone close to them on Facebook. A majority disagree that Facebook is the best method, other than friends or family, for sharing news of the death of someone close to them (50%) or themselves dying (58%).

- While higher proportions across age groups disagree about sharing news on Facebook than agree, younger British adults are more likely to do this than older adults. A quarter (25%) of 18 – 24 year olds agree that Facebook would be the best method other than contacting close family and friends, for sharing news of themselves dying, compared to only one in ten (11%) of those aged 65 and over.
- There is a clear argument for transferring digital properties; half (51%) of the British public agree that they should be able to transfer digital properties they have paid for to someone else when they die, compared to only one in nine (11%) who disagree.
- The public are more split on whether someone would be able to access their online accounts if they died. Just less than half (47%) agree with this statement, while around two in five (38%) disagree. This presents a potential risk of important information being inaccessible on death.

Q. Thinking of social media and the end of life, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	NET: Agree	NET: Disagree	Don't know	Prefer not to say
I should be able to transfer digital properties I have paid for (e.g. music, films, games) to someone else when I die	51%	11%	3%	22%
If I died tomorrow, someone I trust would know how to access my online accounts, including email and social media	47%	38%	9%	4%
Apart from contacting close friends and family, Facebook is the best method for sharing news of the death of someone close to me	26%	50%	12%	3%
If I knew I was dying, apart from contacting close friends and family, Facebook would be the best method of sharing the news	21%	58%	10%	3%
If someone I know on social media dies, I unfriend their account on Facebook soon after	8%	40%	16%	4%

Base: All GB adults (n=2,085)

THANK YOU

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