

# Putting animals to sleep can give veterinarians suicidal thoughts

January 29 2024, by Anne Wennberg

---



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Helene Seljenes Dalum has carried out research on what causes veterinarians to have suicidal thoughts. In June, she completed her doctorate at IMB, which brought her a little nearer to discovering the reasons behind the statistics.

An earlier Norwegian study showed that the suicide rate among [veterinarians](#) was double that of the general population during the period from 1960–2000.

Veterinarians who often euthanize animals are more likely to have serious suicidal thoughts, compared with veterinarians who seldom put animals to sleep. This was revealed by Dalum's study (the NORVET project) which was recently [published](#) in the journal *BMC Psychiatry*.

Dalum invited all the veterinarians in Norway to answer an extensive questionnaire and received answers from about 2,600 of them, or 75% of all those contacted, which is a high response rate.

It has been suggested that euthanizing animals is a risk factor for suicide among veterinarians. Previous studies carried out in other countries have shown that veterinarians feel that putting animals to sleep is distressing and that it leads to moral strain and work stress. The correlation between [euthanasia](#) and suicidal thoughts is a new discovery that needs to be confirmed by further studies, says Dalum, who is a veterinarian herself.

Euthanasia or assisted dying in humans means that one ends a person's life at his or her freely given request, or that one helps a person to take his or her own life. This is illegal in Norway, but is an ongoing subject of discussion. Attitudes to euthanasia in humans can perhaps tell us something about people's attitudes to death.

For many veterinarians, euthanizing animals is part of the job. "We found that those who worked with family pets had more [positive](#)

[attitudes](#) to euthanasia for humans than other veterinarians," explains Dalum.

Nearly 30% of veterinarians in Norway have felt that life was not worth living during the last year, 5% have experienced serious [suicidal thoughts](#) and 1 in 500 has tried to take his or her own life.

Little research has been done on the possible causes for the high suicide rate among veterinarians. The NORVET study indicates that euthanizing animals can pose a particular risk factor for this professional group.

In several studies, veterinarians say that they receive too little training in how to tackle demanding clinical situations, such as euthanasia. It is positive that [mental health](#) now figures on the agenda among veterinarians, comments Dalum.

**More information:** Helene Seljenes Dalum et al, Euthanasia of animals—association with veterinarians' suicidal thoughts and attitudes towards assisted dying in humans: a nationwide cross-sectional survey (the NORVET study), *BMC Psychiatry* (2024). [DOI: 10.1186/s12888-023-05402-7](#)

Suicidal thoughts, animal euthanasia, and help-seeking among veterinarians in Norway: a nationwide and cross-sectional survey (The NORVET study). [www.duo.uio.no/handle/10852/102549](http://www.duo.uio.no/handle/10852/102549)

Provided by University of Oslo

Citation: Putting animals to sleep can give veterinarians suicidal thoughts (2024, January 29) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-01-animals-veterinarians-suicidal-thoughts.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.