

Gender differences in the willingness to donate organs

C. Weiss¹, Ch. Knauss¹, E. Zemp¹

¹ Gender and Health Unit, Department of Epidemiology and Public Health. Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute

ABSTRACT

Background: Transplantations of organs, tissues and cells have increased world-wide over the past decades, and supply of donor organs remains insufficient. A gender imbalance is known for kidney transplantations, with two third of transplanted kidneys being donated by women and two third of kidney receivers being men. The aim of this study was to analyse gender differences in the willingness to donate organs using data from the Swiss Health Survey 2007.

Methods: The Swiss Health Survey 2007 assesses detailed information on health and health determinants based on a telephone interview and a written questionnaire (n= 18760). Weighted frequency distributions of willingness to donate organs (six items Likert scale) were calculated, and logistic regression with the outcome "being highly willing to donate organs post-mortem" (answer 6 on the Likert scale) conducted separately for women and men.

Results: More women reported to be highly willing to donate organs post-mortem compared to men (32% vs. 27%), with largest gender differences in the youngest age groups. More women reported to have a donator certificate (14% vs. 10%), and among these, more women had informed their relatives about their willingness to donate organs (39% vs. 34%). In stratified logistic regression analyses, discrepant associations were seen between willingness to donate organs and sense of control: women indicating a high sense of control had a higher likelihood (OR 1.27, 95% CI 1.02-1.58) to be highly motivated to donate organs, whereas men with a high sense of control were less likely to report to be willing to donate organs (OR 0.81, 95% CI 0.67 – 0.98). Younger age was associated with willingness to donate organs only in women. Furthermore, men were more likely to report willingness to donate organs when they had one consultation with a general practitioner in the last 12 months (OR 1.29, 95% CI 1.02-1.62), women when they saw a gynaecologists once in the last 12 months (OR 1.17, 95% CI 1.01-1.34), or stayed once in hospital (OR 1.36, 95% CI 1.11-1.67) in the last 12 months.

Conclusion: Reported willingness to donate organs post mortem is more pronounced in women than in men, particularly in younger age groups, and is higher in the presence of recent contacts within the health system. A high sense of control seems to have a differential impact in women and men on the willingness to donate organs.