

Knowledge About Legal Regulations Regarding Organ Transplantation Among High School and University Students in Poland

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ABSTRACT

Background. It has been reported in many studies that although young people have positive attitudes towards organ donation, their knowledge about transplantation is insufficient. This study focused on knowledge about legal regulations regarding organ transplantation in Poland.

Materials and Methods. A 59-item, self-designed questionnaire was administered to 1011 young persons from Central Poland. Among the interviewees were 462 high school students, 184 students of the faculty of medicine, and 365 students from other faculties. The survey was divided into 4 parts: knowledge (basic information, maximum of 17 points; statistics, maximum of 5 points and legal regulations – maximum of 6 points), attitude, personal experience and general characteristics of the interviewees.

Results. High school and university students received 1.45 ± 1.24 and 1.54 ± 1.1 ($P = .26$) out of a maximal score of 6 with respect to knowledge of legal regulations. Medical students scored much higher (4.13 ± 1.23). Only 20 respondents (including 19 medical students) answered correctly all 6 questions. Those who were willing to donate their organs after death achieved better result than those who did not want to donate (1.6 ± 1.22 vs 1.34 ± 1.1 ; $P = .002$). Personal experiences did not influence knowledge about transplantation.

Conclusion. Knowledge about legal regulations regarding organ transplantation is insufficient among young people. Structured, well-considered education programs at various levels of school and academic education are needed to improve public awareness and attitude.

ACCESS to organ transplantation largely depends on the attitude toward transplantation in society. There is a worldwide problem of an organ shortage that could be overcome mainly by an increase in the number of persons who do not oppose organ donation after death [1].

The laws that regulate both living and deceased organ donation and transplantation ought to be widely accepted by the society. This would expedite the organ procurement procedure and could prevent patients and health care professionals from encountering many uncomfortable situations, which arise mainly due to a lack of mutual understanding between patients and physicians, mostly in the context of so-called presumed consent, which has been adopted in most countries in Europe including Poland [2].

Nowadays, awareness campaigns focused on organ donation and transplantation are widely conducted. Recently, the social media have become the main platform for such

campaigns [3]. Unfortunately, the lack of complex information provided in these campaigns and the difficulties in coordinating the efforts of those who contribute have been identified as important limitations. Therefore such campaigns cannot be the only source of knowledge for society. In addition, ethical fundamentals of the programs and social media applications [4] are undermined in the context of proper consent and informed decision making [5].

In this study, we focused on the assessment of knowledge about legal regulations of organ transplantation in Poland.

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So far, numerous papers focusing on knowledge and attitudes towards transplantation have been published. General knowledge and attitudes have been investigated in many different populations. However, to the best of our knowledge, this study is the first that has concentrated on the knowledge of the legal background of organ transplantation among high school and university students.

Study Group and Methods

General characteristics of the survey participants are provided in Table 1. A self-designed questionnaire was used, which consisted of 4 parts. In the first part, the knowledge of interviewees was assessed. They were asked to evaluate as true or false 28 statements about organ transplantation, concerning general information, transplantation statistics, and regulations. In addition, a “don’t know” answer was available. Each correct answer was scored as 1, and incorrect and “don’t know” answers were scored as 0 points. In the second part, attitudes toward organ transplantation were evaluated. The respondents were asked to evaluate 12 assertions using 5-point Likert scale. In the next part, the participants were asked about any personal experience related to transplantation. The questions included any transplantation undergone by family members or friends and a personal or family history of disease that could be treated by transplantation. The respondent was considered to be experienced if he or she answered “yes” at least once. In the last part of the survey, respondents were asked about their sex, age, place of residence, and religious beliefs.

The anonymous and voluntary survey was completed in paper form. The study protocol was approved by the local Ethics Committee. Permission was given by the authorities of the high schools and deans of the faculties.

Statistical Analysis

For statistical analysis, Statsoft Statistica v.12 software was used. The normality of variables distribution was assessed with Shapiro-Wilk test. The parametric t test or the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test was used for comparisons between groups. Correlations between continuous variables were calculated with the Pearson method.

Table 1. General Characteristics of the Study Group

	High School Students	University Students	
		Nonmedical	Medical
Number of participants	462	365	184
Demography			
Age, y, median (range)	17 (15–21)	20 (18–59)	23 (18–27)
Male sex, n (%)	260 (56.3%)	86 (23.7%)	73 (39.7%)
Place of residence			
Large city, n (%)	191 (41.3%)	137 (37.6%)	74 (40.2%)
Small city, n (%)	96 (20.8%)	118 (32.3%)	77 (41.8%)
Village, n (%)	175 (37.9%)	110 (30.1%)	33 (18%)

RESULTS

The main analysis included the comparison between high school and university students, excluding the students of medical faculties. The results in the latter group are given at the end of this section.

High school and university students received a score of 1.45 ± 1.24 and 1.54 ± 1.1 out of 6, respectively ($P = .26$). The responses to the questions addressing the legal regulations with the percentage of correct answers given by high school and nonmedical university students are provided in Table 2. There was only 1 interviewee from these groups who answered correctly all 6 questions about legal regulations (Fig 1).

Respondents who were in favor of the donation of their organs after death received better scores relating to their knowledge about organ transplantation compared to respondents who did not want to donate organs after death (1.6 ± 1.22 vs 1.34 ± 1.1 ; $P = .002$). Such a difference was not seen when respondents were asked about living donor donation. Personal experience did not influence the level of the knowledge (1.55 ± 1.16 vs 1.48 ± 1.17 ; $P = .44$). Respondents who provided information to their families about their attitudes toward organ donation received significantly better scores than those who did not discuss that issue with their families (1.67 ± 1.23 vs 1.38 ± 1.12 , respectively; $P = .0009$). The level of knowledge was not influenced by having the Donor Card showing the willingness of the person to donate after death. A weak positive correlation ($r = 0.134$; $P < .001$) between the time of the education (from the beginning of the primary school) and the level of the knowledge was revealed.

The origin of the information about organ transplantation significantly ($P < .001$) influenced awareness of the legal regulations. The best results were achieved by the interviewees, who learned about the transplantation at the university or during high school classes and from “other sources”; these included their own experience, books, TV series such as “House M.D.,” and movies. The lowest results

Table 2. Percentage of Correct Answers Given by High School and Nonmedical University Students

Statement	Correct Answer (F = false; T = true)	% of Correct Answers
The only criterion for the organ allocation is the order on the waiting list.	F	48.9%
In Poland the presumed consent is a legally acknowledged for organ procurement.	T	24.9%
The physician is obliged to receive the family consent for organ procurement.	F	10.4%
The recipient is entitled to know the personal data of a deceased donor.	F	42%
Declarations of dialysis patients who do not agree to kidney transplantation are collected in the Central Objection Registry.	F	11%
The Donor Card is a legally binding declaration.	F	12%

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