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Religious beliefs; Barrier or mainspring to organ donation

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Dear Editor,

Today, transplantation of human organs and the growing need for transplant organs are major issues that challenge health policymakers, doctors, ethicists, lawyers, and the religious leaders in many countries around the world. Given the importance of this issue, global, regional and national organizations have developed and adopted comprehensive ethical rules and regulations in order to thwart immoral practices while meeting the needs of the community. Organ transplant guidelines have been passed into law in some countries whereas in others, general moral principles are followed (1,2).

In an editorial by Dr. Bastani in one of the issues of *J Nephrothol*, he elucidated the worries regarding the growing trend of organ shortage in the United States and well described the Iranian model of organ donation as a successful example in this critical issue (1). However, another factor that has been less investigated and seems to play basic role in this issue is the religious, Islamic and spiritual beliefs that exist among Iranian population in comparison to many other countries.

Primarily, we need to determine those parameters that

truly play a role in the process of decision making for organ donation, and investigate the effective methods to promote the willingness of the population for applying this valuable life saving behavior in the society. Previous studies introduced several factors such as lack of information about organ donation, emotional and spiritual issues, cultural values, socioeconomic factors, and religious beliefs that compel individual and family members in order to reach a decision in donating an organ (2,3). But, unfortunately the proportion of population based studies considering this issue among diverse ethnic and cultural groups is scarce. Therefore, considering the significant influence of religious beliefs, this potential factor should be underlined in designing the future studies in religious communities.

There are studies that identified religious issues and unfamiliarity with the donation process as the most common reason for opposition to organ donation (4). Although there are many barriers to organ donation including religious one, the latter can also be used as a strong motivation for approaching to donate organ. Accordingly, studies in religious countries revealed

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that, these beliefs have a crucial role in tissue and organ donation and transplantation (5). However, the definitive role of this factor in the process of decision making is still unclear. It is well-known that the viewpoints toward transplantation is varied among different societies. Some cultures give great importance to ancestral traditions and beliefs (6). Bresnahan et al indicated that spiritual connection was a significant predictor of behavioral intention among Korean respondents, while spiritual concern identified as a predictor of reluctance in American respondents (7). Moreover, while it was believed that Muslims in North America had a negative trend toward organ donation (8), a recent study did not show a relation between higher levels of intrinsic religiosity or adherence to Islamic ethics and attitude toward deceased organ donation (9).

During the last decade remarkable efforts have been performed by Islamic scholars to reevaluate the rulings and beliefs, and to clarify religious ethical guidelines about end-of-life issues, and organ donation after death. In the holy *Quran* (the holly book of Muslims), it is well emphasized that saving a life is as of saving all mankind. However, in the case of deceased donation, the legal guardian must give the necessary consents to do so. To overcome religious barriers in some more conservative Muslim societies, several options such as reinterpreting religious texts, educating religious leaders, utilizing multimedia, and educational reform system have been suggested by some and strongly disputed by others (10). More studies are needed to characterize the associated factors in each unique culture and society for promoting the positive attitudes regarding this promising treatment (i.e., tissue and organ transplantation) for various life threatening and incurable diseases.

Authors' contribution

All authors contributed equally to the manuscript.

Conflicts of interest

There were no points of conflicts.

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