

# Study shows people reading about organ donor recipients more receptive to donating than when reading about donors

May 2 2017, by Bob Yirka

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(Phys.org)—A small team of researchers affiliated with Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel and Decision Research and the University of Oregon in the U.S. has found evidence that suggests people are more open to donating organs after reading about donor recipients than after reading about donors. In their paper published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the team describes their study, which involved querying volunteers after reading material about organ donation.

Most people are aware of their option to donate their own [body parts](#) after death, or some of their parts while still alive—and some have discovered that they have been placed in the position of choosing whether to donate organs of [family members](#) after they have died. Organ donation makes life better for recipients, but as the [researchers](#) with this new effort note, quite often recipients do not get nearly as much media attention as donors, and that might impact the receptiveness of potential organ donors.

To learn more about the impact of reading material regarding organ donation, the researchers asked 650 undergraduate students to read various types of material on the topic—stories about donors, recipients, and in some cases, both of them, etc. The volunteers were then asked to fill out a questionnaire that was designed to gauge receptiveness to donating their own organs or those of deceased relatives.

In studying the data, the researchers found that reading material highlighting information about the recipient led to feelings of increased receptiveness to organ donation by the volunteers or for a deceased relative (or to support a transition to an opt-out policy) than for material about the donor. They also found that reading about a donor who had since passed on led to feelings of reduced receptiveness toward donation.

The researchers also took a survey of several newspapers over a

28-month period searching for articles focused on organ donation and found that many more of them focused on the [donor](#) than on the recipient. They suggest that their results signal a need to focus more on recipients than on donors in order to better promote [organ donation](#) to help those on waiting lists.

**More information:** Inbal Harel et al. Effect of media presentations on willingness to commit to organ donation, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2017). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1703020114](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1703020114)

### Abstract

We examine how presentations of organ donation cases in the media may affect people's willingness to sign organ donation commitment cards, donate the organs of a deceased relative, support the transition to an "opt-out" policy, or donate a kidney while alive. We found that providing identifying information about the prospective recipient (whose life was saved by the donation) increased the participants' willingness to commit to organ donation themselves, donate the organs of a deceased relative, or support a transition to an "opt-out" policy. Conversely, identifying the deceased donor tended to induce thoughts of death rather than about saving lives, resulting in fewer participants willing to donate organs or support measures that facilitated organ donation. A study of online news revealed that identification of the donor is significantly more common than identification of the recipient in the coverage of organ donation cases—with possibly adverse effects on the incidence of organ donations.

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