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## **Organ Donation and Transplantation in Pakistan: Religious, Social, Ethical and Economical Perspectives**

**Zeeshan Ali Awan<sup>i</sup>**

### **Abstract**

*Organ donation and transplantation are powerful means of saving lives, but the growing demand for organ transplants remains unmet, presenting significant challenges. This study explores the concept of organ donation and transplantation in Pakistani society, focusing on the influence of religious, social, cultural, ethical, and economic factors on public perceptions and practices. Despite the urgent need for organ donations, Pakistan faces a persistent shortage, leading to a substantial number of deaths due to organ failure annually. The primary objective of this research is to identify the underlying reasons why organ donation remains a complex issue in Pakistan and propose strategies to foster wider societal acceptance. A key focus is the religious perspective, particularly within Islam, where misconceptions about the permissibility of organ donation persist. Islamic law, derived from the Quran and Hadith, supports organ donation to save lives; however, many remain unaware or misinformed about these guidelines. Cultural and social norms further hinder deceased organ donation, especially with respect to familial decision-making and traditional death rituals. Cultural values emphasizing respect for the human body also contribute to opposition against posthumous donation. Ethical concerns, particularly regarding voluntariness and organ trafficking, complicate the situation. Economic factors, including widespread poverty, socioeconomic disparities, and the high costs of transplant procedures, exacerbate the challenge, while inadequate healthcare infrastructure hampers efforts to improve donation rates. This research adopts a qualitative methodology, and expert opinions to examine these issues and propose viable solutions. Findings emphasize*

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*the importance of increasing public awareness, providing religious and ethical guidance, implementing government interventions, and improving healthcare infrastructure. The study concludes that fostering a supportive environment for organ donation in Pakistan requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach, including legislative reforms, educational initiatives, and collaboration among policymakers, medical professionals, and religious scholars. These efforts could save many lives and strengthen the country's healthcare system.*

**Keywords:** *Organ donation, Transplantations, Pakistani society, Religion, Islam.*

## Introduction

Islam is a Dīn<sup>1</sup> (way of life) revealed by Allah s. w. t for the guidance and betterment of whole humanity. The main purpose of Islamic preaching is to facilitate the society and provide standard for human life. Organ donation mainly refers to giving an organ to help someone who needs a transplant. The exchange of an organ or tissue from one person to another with the intention of replacing the damaged organ or tissue of the recipient is called transplantation. An organ transplant is typically carried out when an individual's organs cease to work correctly, severely restricting their ability to engage in daily activities and increasing their risk of early death in young age. It is performed as a proper surgical operation in every case<sup>2</sup>.

A kidney or portion of a liver is taken out of a living donor and given to a designated patient, who is typically a close family. Every year in Pakistan, hundreds of people who die with organ failure await organ transplants in order to survive. Although exact statistics are unavailable, Pakistan needs 25,000 kidneys, 100,000 livers, 7,000 hearts, 2,000 pancreas, and 2,000 lungs annually<sup>3</sup>. The nation's living organ donation programs have not been able to keep up with the increasing number of end-stage illnesses. According to the National Centre for Health Statistics, organ failure is a primary cause of death in Pakistan. So, in this situation the state has basic responsibilities to provide the human organ to save the human life<sup>4</sup>.

In this critical situation, the Pakistani government took significant steps. First, an ordinance was passed in 2007, which allowed deceased organ donation in Pakistan. Second, to promote and address various aspects of deceased organ donation, the Transplantation Society of Pakistan was established. Third, the society began organizing conferences and seminars to raise awareness about organ donation and transplantation within Pakistani society<sup>5</sup>. Thanks to these efforts, the situation has improved, and the awareness of organ donation among Pakistanis is now approximately 60%. However, there is still a lack of a structured program for deceased organ donation in Pakistan. Additionally, the reluctance

of people to donate organs after death contributes to the increased demand for living organ donations<sup>6</sup>. From an Islamic perspective, numerous fatawa (religious edicts) address the issue of organ donation and transplantation. The primary role of Islamic scholars is to raise awareness and provide guidance on this matter in line with Islamic teachings. In Pakistani society, the state has faced significant challenges regarding organ donation and transplantation, primarily due to a lack of awareness and deeply ingrained social issues. This study examines the prevailing perceptions of organ donation and transplantation within Pakistani society and explores potential solutions to these challenges based on the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah.

## Literature Review

Existing research indicates that while several studies have explored various aspects of organ donation and transplantation, no specific work has comprehensively examined 'Organ Donation and Transplantation in Pakistan: Religious, Social, Ethical, and Economic Perspectives.' However, some scholarly works provide valuable insights and guidance on relevant dimensions of this topic, contributing to a broader understanding of the issue.

Ilyas, Muhammad; Alam, Mukhtar; Ahmad, Habib in their article “*The Islamic Perspective of Organ Donation in Pakistan*,” examined the concept of organ donation in light of the Islamic perspective. It has been established through the Quran and Hadith that it is permissible for a person to donate their body or parts of it after death to treat those in need of transplants. Additionally, the removal of organs from a deceased person to save the life of a critically ill patient is also permitted. However, it is important to note that while organ donation is allowed under both Islamic teachings and Pakistani law, the sale of human organs is strictly prohibited. Receiving monetary compensation for an organ is considered unlawful and contradicts Islamic principles<sup>7</sup>.

The research by Maryam Sultan Khan, titled “*Organ Transplantation, Ethics, and the Role of the Medical Community and Media in Pakistan*,” examines the contributing factors to organ trafficking in Pakistan. According to a WHO report, Pakistan is ranked among the top five countries involved in the illegal trade of human organs. The primary drivers of this illicit activity include poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and limited access to healthcare. In response to this grave issue, the Government of Pakistan has undertaken significant measures, most notably through the formulation of the “*Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues bill*”. This legislation strictly prohibits all forms of illegal organ trade and stipulates a 10-year prison sentence for individuals involved in the unlawful sale of human organs. Despite these efforts, however, the existing legal framework alone is insufficient to fully address the issue. To effectively combat the illegal organ trade, the

government must implement additional, targeted strategies aimed at addressing the root causes and reinforcing enforcement mechanisms<sup>8</sup>.

A group of scholars from the medical sciences, including Kaleem Ullah et al., presented a research paper titled "*Obstacles to Deceased Donor Transplantation in Pakistan*." This study offers a comprehensive analysis of the factors that impede deceased organ donation in the country. According to a report from the health department, thousands of patients in Pakistan die each year due to organ failure, underscoring the gravity of the issue. The barriers to deceased organ donation stem from a complex interplay of religious, economic, social, demographic, and political challenges. In conclusion, the authors propose three key recommendations to address this critical issue: first, raising public awareness; second, fostering engagement within the medical community; and third, securing government support. These measures are essential for initiating and establishing effective deceased donor programs in Pakistan<sup>9</sup>.

## Discussion

According to the 2023 census, Pakistan's population has reached 240.5 million, with 95.35% identifying as Muslim and the remaining 5.35% belonging to various other religious communities. Regionally, 65% of the population resides in rural areas, while 35% lives in urban centers. The per capita income of the country is \$408 per year. The national literacy rate stands at 62.3%, with female literacy notably lower at 41.5%<sup>10</sup>. These statistics highlight that Pakistan is one of the most populous countries, yet its literacy rate remains comparatively low relative to other developing nations. Moreover, socioeconomic factors contribute to a range of challenges, particularly in the sectors of education and healthcare. While the healthcare sector is facing significant challenges, it is also experiencing notable advancements in high-tech tertiary-level medicine. These advancements include specialized fields such as cardiology, cardiac surgery, major joint replacements, reproductive technology, and organ transplantation. In Pakistani society, various factors—including religious, economic, social, and demographic influences, as well as a general lack of awareness—significantly shape public perceptions of blood donation and organ transplantation. Consequently, these diverse factors contribute to a range of perspectives that influence attitudes toward these practices.

## Religious Concepts

In Pakistan, religion plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of organ donation and transplantation. Given that the majority of the population adheres to Islam, it is crucial to understand the Islamic perspective on these issues. However, due to widespread misinformation and a lack of awareness, many believe that Islam prohibits organ donation

and transplantation. In reality, organ donation and transplantation are permitted under Islamic law, with specific guidelines and conditions. It is important to note, however, that the mutilation of organs and the desecration of a deceased body are strictly prohibited. From an Islamic perspective, there are two primary schools of thought regarding the permissibility of organ donation and transplantation. Several scholars and institutions, including the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) and the Pakistan Ulama Council, have issued fatwas permitting organ donation under specific conditions, emphasizing the principle of saving lives (Maslah). In contrast, some conservative scholars express reservations about organ donation, citing concerns related to the violation of physical integrity post-mortem and the principle of Qadar (Divine Will). These scholars argue that interfering with the human body, which is considered a trust from Allah, undermines its integrity and respect<sup>11</sup>.

Islam consistently upholds the dignity and sanctity of the human body, both living and deceased, emphasizing the importance of respect, honor, and inviolability. Furthermore, Islamic law strongly advocates for the preservation of human life. The principle "necessities permit the prohibited" (al-darurat tub al-mahzurat) is frequently invoked to justify organ donation, provided that the act serves to save or significantly improve another person's life, with the potential benefits outweighing any possible harm or ethical concerns<sup>12</sup>. The Quran provides guidance on this matter, with several verses cited in support of organ donation, as Allah (SWT) states:

وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا<sup>13</sup>

“And whoever save one it is as he had save mankind entirely”.

Organ donation and transplantation have the potential to save countless lives annually. If individuals fully understood the significance of registering as organ donors and voluntarily donating their organs during their lifetime, the impact on public health could be profound. While this initiative is crucial in preserving human life, raising societal awareness is essential for achieving optimal outcomes. Increased public understanding of the importance of organ donation is necessary to address the ongoing shortages of available organs and improve overall health outcomes. In Hadith the Holy Prophet say:

خير الناس من ينفع الناس<sup>14</sup>

"Better than you people are those who benefit people."

According to Hadith, the fundamental purpose of goodness is to benefit humanity. Organ donation and transplantation serve as significant means of facilitating human well-being and are essential for saving lives within society. Islamic law permits organ donation under

the principle of necessity, where the preservation of human life is given precedence. The concept of “Maslahah” (public good) further supports this practice, as the protection of life is one of the five primary objectives of Islamic law (Maqasid al-Shariah). In accordance with Islamic law and scholarly interpretations, the majority of scholars agree that the removal of organs from a deceased individual for transplantation to save a critically ill patient is permissible. Similarly, it is considered lawful for an individual to donate their body or specific organs for medical use after death to assist those in need of transplants. While some Muslim scholars hold differing opinions on this matter, the prevailing scholarly consensus supports organ donation based on the principle of Maslahah (public good). However, scholars unanimously agree that the commercial trade of human organs, including buying and selling, is strictly prohibited under Islamic law<sup>15</sup>.

Some Muslim scholars oppose organ donation, arguing that bodily integrity and human dignity must be preserved, even after death. According to these scholars, the human body is a sacred gift from Allah and should not be altered or tampered with, particularly after death. Islam emphasizes the special honor and respect due to the human body, both in life and after death. In this regard, the Quran states, “Indeed, We have conferred dignity on the children of Adam” underscoring the sanctity of the human body.<sup>16</sup> According to some scholars, this verse suggests that the human body must be treated with honor and respect, even after death. As a result, these scholars argue that it is forbidden to cut or remove organs from either a living or deceased body. They strongly oppose postmortem organ donation, viewing it as a form of mutilation and a violation of human dignity. Furthermore, these scholars assert that human bodies are entrusted to individuals by God and are not considered personal property. Therefore, individuals do not have the right to donate or sell their organs. Additionally, Islamic teachings, as conveyed in hadith, prohibit the mutilation of human bodies. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is reported to have said, “Breaking the bone of a dead person is like breaking it when he is alive,” emphasizing the prohibition against desecrating the human body<sup>17</sup>. This hadith underscores the importance of maintaining integrity and respect even after death, suggesting that causing harm to a deceased person is as grave as harming a living one. In the context of this viewpoint, the removal of organs is viewed as mutilation, particularly when it involves a deceased individual. It is evident that Islam places significant emphasis on honoring and safeguarding the human body after death, as demonstrated by the hadiths regarding muthlah (desecration). Some scholars argue that the imperative to preserve life may justify exceptions to this rule, while others assert that organ removal remains categorically prohibited based on these principles. This ongoing debate highlights the complex intersection of Islamic ethics, religious teachings, and medical practice.

In a nutshell, the Islamic debate about organ donation and transplantation is deeply rooted in concepts of divine ownership, bodily sanctity, and human dignity. While some scholars advocate for organ donation as a life-saving measure, others strongly oppose it, considering it a violation of Islamic law.

## **Social and Cultural Concepts**

The term "social-cultural influences" describes how social elements that affect behaviour individually include interpersonal interactions, cultural standards, and societal expectations. Social and cultural factors fundamentally influence a society's thoughts, attitudes, values, beliefs, and interactions. These factors not only influence individual attitudes, behaviors, and thought processes but also contribute significantly to the formation and evolution of societal concepts. In Pakistani society, social and cultural also significantly influence attitudes toward organ donation and transplantation<sup>18</sup>. Given high priority to family system in Pakistan, mostly peoples live in joint family system although this trend is decreasing due to urbanization but family ties are still maintained.

Therefore, it is relatively easy to find a suitable family living donor in Pakistan. In Joint family system, family decisions are very important. In this scenario the decision of individual person for organ donation is often rejected, it also need for family approval, this situation creating a barrier to deceased donations. This is one of the hindrances in the development of deceased donor transplantation in Pakistan as in other neighboring countries<sup>19</sup>. Similarly low awareness among the general public and a lack of motivation related to community support is a result of this situation. **Death and Mourning Traditions customs are also create barrier about organ donation and transplantation.** In Pakistani culture Funeral practices and attitudes related to death person emphasize respect and honor for the body, according to religion preaching it is good and also symbol of ethical society. But this factor also often leads to resistance in discussing or agreeing to organ donation after a loved one's death<sup>20</sup>. It is the time, people need to change their concept to save human life, because every year thousands of people die due to unavailability of human organs.

For the purpose of saving lives, it is imperative to alter attitudes toward organ donation in spite of these obstacles. Thousands of people lose their lives each year as a result of organ shortages, underscoring the critical need for increased awareness, education, and legislative change. Pakistan can create a more ethical and sustainable transplant system that saves many lives by resolving religious concerns, promoting public dialogue, and cultivating an organ donor culture. The government, religious leaders, medical experts, and the general public must work together to address Pakistan's organ donation issues. Last but not least, Pakistani government need some effort to devolve standard social and culture system to save thousands of lives annually by increasing awareness, enhancing laws, fortifying healthcare facilities, and altering cultural beliefs.

## **Ethical Concepts**

Morality and ethics are fundamentally interconnected with the core principles of society. The concept of ethics is essential in forming interpersonal relationships and affecting how people interact with one another and the environment. The moral precepts known as ethics serve as a guide for people's conduct, choices, and actions. These precepts rest on the ideas of good and evil, justice and fairness, and right and wrong<sup>21</sup>. In Pakistani society, many

ethical issues around organ donation revolve around fairness, voluntariness, and the prevention of exploitation.

**Voluntary Donation:** In Pakistan People believe that ethically, organ donation is based on voluntary consent, without financial lure or pressure. It is very difficult for the state to consolidate organ donation and transplantation systems on a voluntary basis. Concerns about the commercialization of organ transplantation have engendered significant skepticism in the donation system. This issue remains a significant challenge in Pakistani society, serving as a major barrier to the acceptance and ethical implementation of organ donation and transplantation.

**Organ Trafficking:** Pakistan has a history of organ trafficking, where the poor and vulnerable have been exploited for their organs. Ethical considerations demand strict measures to prevent such exploitation and ensure that organ donation is based on genuine altruism rather than financial desperation.

**Disparities in Organ Transplant Access in Pakistan:** In Pakistan, there exists a significant disparity in access to organ transplantation between the wealthy and the economically disadvantaged. In the event of organ failure, individuals with financial resources can leverage their wealth to secure transplants, while those from lower socio-economic backgrounds often lack the necessary financial means, preventing them from accessing life-saving organ transplants. This inequity contributes to disproportionately higher mortality rates among the poor. To address this issue, it is imperative to strengthen ethical organ donation systems to ensure equitable access to transplantation for all individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status. The existing systems must be restructured to guarantee that organ transplants are equally accessible to both the wealthy and the poor, as the current healthcare framework in Pakistan often fails to provide such parity<sup>22</sup>.

In Pakistan, ethical organ donation and transplantation require balancing social justice, religious beliefs, individual rights, and medical ethics. In this context, a fair and sustainable organ donation system necessitates addressing socioeconomic disparities, strengthening legislative frameworks, enhancing public awareness, and promoting ethical medical practices. Especially, Pakistan needs to establish a system that upholds human dignity, combats exploitation, and saves lives by incorporating ethical concepts with healthcare reforms.

### **Economic Barriers to Organ Donation in Pakistan**

In 2023, Pakistan is grappling with an economic crisis driven by multiple challenges, resulting in a state of economic instability. This economic precariousness is a significant barrier to the establishment of a proper system for organ donation and transplantation in the country. In this context, various stakeholders have contributed negatively to the



situation. Their lack of interest and apathy have led to substantial delays in the development and implementation of organ donation and transplantation programs in Pakistan. Moreover, similar to many other Islamic nations, Pakistan has yet to enable deceased donor transplantation, primarily due to the absence of appropriate legislation and the failure to implement court rulings effectively. To date, no government has taken substantial steps to promote the deceased organ donation system, further hindering progress in this critical area of healthcare<sup>23</sup>. Moreover, following three economic factors also play a role in shaping perceptions and behaviors related to organ donation in Pakistan.

- **Poverty and Organ Sale:** In countries where poverty is widespread, some individuals may be compelled to sell their organs illegally as a means of alleviating their financial hardships. Organ trafficking often emerges as a consequence of severe socio-economic disparities, wherein wealthy individuals exploit vulnerable, impoverished populations by purchasing organs from those in need. This exploitation highlights the intersection of economic inequality and human rights violations, as marginalized individuals are often left with no alternative but to resort to selling their organs for survival.
- **Cost of Transplantation:** The prohibitive cost of organ transplantation presents a significant barrier for many individuals in Pakistan, as the expenses extend beyond the surgery itself, encompassing long-term post-operative care, medications, and follow-up treatments. This financial burden severely limits access to life-saving transplants, reducing the demand for legally obtained organ donations. Consequently, individuals in need of transplants may face dire consequences due to their inability to afford the necessary procedures, further exacerbating the inequality within the healthcare system.
- **Healthcare Infrastructure Funding:** The government's insufficient investment in healthcare infrastructure, particularly in organ transplant facilities, hampers the development of a robust healthcare system capable of supporting a culture of organ donation. The lack of adequate resources and specialized facilities limits the ability to perform organ transplants efficiently, thereby discouraging potential donors and recipients alike. This underfunding not only impedes the growth of transplant programs but also exacerbates the challenges faced by individuals in need of life-saving procedures, perpetuating disparities in healthcare access and outcomes.<sup>24</sup>

A comprehensive, multifaceted strategy is essential to address these challenges. The government must implement stronger legal frameworks to combat organ trafficking while simultaneously fostering economic growth to reduce poverty. Additionally, the introduction of subsidies and financial assistance programs for transplant recipients can improve access to life-saving surgeries. To ensure a morally sound and effective organ

donation system, substantial investments in healthcare infrastructure are also required. By addressing these issues, Pakistan has the potential to save countless lives and cultivate a voluntary, lawful organ donation culture that benefits both donors and recipients.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, organ donation and transplantation in Pakistan face significant challenges shaped by religious, social, cultural, ethical, and economic factors. While Islam supports organ donation under the principles of saving lives, there remains a need for increased awareness and education within Pakistani society to dispel misconceptions. The government has taken steps, such as enacting laws and establishing the Transplantation Society of Pakistan, but further efforts are needed, particularly in promoting deceased organ donation and addressing the illegal organ trade. Overcoming barriers like poverty, ethical concerns, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure requires collaboration between religious scholars, medical professionals, and policymakers. A sustained public awareness campaign and the development of a robust legal framework can contribute to creating a more supportive environment for organ donation, ultimately saving lives and improving public health in Pakistan

## **Recommendation:**

To address the challenges surrounding organ donation and transplantation in Pakistan, a multi-faceted approach is necessary:

1. **Increased Public Awareness:** A national campaign, leveraging media, religious scholars, and community leaders, is crucial to educate the public about the permissibility and life-saving potential of organ donation in Islam. Misconceptions about religious prohibitions need to be actively countered through consistent messaging.
2. **Promotion of Deceased Organ Donation:** The government should prioritize expanding awareness and infrastructure for deceased organ donation programs. Public engagement should emphasize the benefits of donating organs after death to save lives, with clear guidance on legal and ethical processes.
3. **Stricter Enforcement Against Organ Trafficking:** Illegal organ trafficking must be curbed with stricter enforcement of existing laws, particularly the Human Organ Transplantation Act (HOTA). Efforts should include prosecuting violators and supporting vulnerable populations to prevent exploitation.
4. **Improving Healthcare Infrastructure:** A larger investment in healthcare, particularly in transplant services, is needed to ensure equitable access for all

citizens. This includes providing affordable post-transplant care and increasing the number of transplant centers.

5. **Religious and Ethical Guidance:** Collaboration between religious scholars and healthcare professionals should continue to ensure that Islamic guidance on organ donation is made widely available and accepted, reducing societal resistance.

These steps would significantly contribute to fostering a culture of organ donation in Pakistan, potentially saving thousands of lives.

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