



ORGAN DONATION:

WHY WOMEN DONATE MORE -Rtn Lal Goel

International Women's Day Special

For decades, a silent pattern has persisted in organ donation worldwide: women consistently donate organs at significantly higher rates than men, while men are more likely to be recipients. As we celebrate International Women's Day, this disparity deserves not just recognition, but understanding.

The Gender Gap in Numbers

According to the World Health Organization's 2024 Global Organ Donation Report, women account for approximately 65% of living organ donors worldwide, yet receive only 39% transplants. In the United States specifically, data from the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) shows that women made up 62% of living kidney donors in 2023 but only 41% of kidney recipients.

In India, the disparity is even more pronounced. According to the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization (NOTTO) 2023 annual registry, women constitute nearly 74% of living organ donors but only 36% of recipients. A study by the Indian Journal of Transplantation tracking donations from 2019-2023 found that mothers (31%) and wives (27%) account for the majority of living donors, while fathers (8%) and husbands (12%) lag significantly behind.

The pattern is especially pronounced

in spousal donations. A comprehensive study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in October 2024 analysed 20 years of transplant data across 27 countries and found that when spouses are compatible donors, wives are four times more likely to donate a kidney to their husbands than husbands are to their wives.

Beyond Biology: Social and Cultural Factors

While some biological factors might contribute to this imbalance (women experience fewer complications as donors and have higher immunological compatibility in some cases), research suggests the disparity is largely rooted in social and cultural dynamics.

The data clearly shows this isn't primarily a biological phenomenon. Social expectations around caregiving, sacrifice, and family responsibilities appear to be the dominant factors driving higher donation rates among women.

A 2023 study in the Journal of Health and Social Behavior surveyed 1,850 potential donors and found women reported 37% more pressure from family and medical professionals to donate than men in similar situations.

Economic Consequences

This disparity carries economic



Rtn LAL GOEL

implications as well. Research published in the *American Journal of Transplantation* in 2024 found female organ donors experience greater financial hardship following donation, with longer employment gaps and steeper income declines compared to male donors. On average, female donors reported 23% higher out-of-pocket expenses related to childcare and household management during recovery.

The economic impact is particularly severe in India, where a 2024 survey by the Indian Society of Organ Transplantation revealed that female donors from lower-income households experienced an average 38% reduction in household income during recovery, compared to 22% for male donors. The study also found that 67% of female donors in India reported having no choice but to return to work before complete recovery due to financial pressures, risking their long-term health outcomes.

Changing the System

Medical institutions are beginning to address these imbalances. The International Transplantation Society updated its ethical guidelines in January 2025 to include mandated screening for external pressure on potential donors, particularly women.

In India, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare launched the "Equitable Donation Initiative" in December 2024, which includes mandatory counselling sessions for families to discuss donation options with all eligible family members present. Additionally, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) pioneered a program that provides enhanced financial support and post-donation care specifically targeting female donors from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Moving Forward

As we reflect on International Women's Day, the organ donation gender gap illustrates how gendered expectations of care and sacrifice persist in modern society, even in life-and-death medical decisions.

Advocacy groups are working to raise awareness about these disparities while promoting gender equity in organ donation and transplantation policies worldwide.

Understanding these patterns is the first step toward addressing them, creating transplantation systems that neither rely on nor reinforce gender inequities – a fitting goal to reflect on this **International Women's Day**.

About the Author

Rtn Lal Goel is a visionary leader and a driving force in Organ Donation advocacy. As Charter President of the Rotary Club of Organ Donation International and Chairman of the Organ Donation India Foundation & GYAN, he has been pivotal in raising awareness about Organ Donation across India. He serves on the National Committee for the National Campaign for Body-Organ Donation (NCBOD) and has been recognised globally for his efforts. He is the ex-officio member of the Karnataka SOTTO advisory committee. His accolades include the Rajiv Gandhi Businessman of the Year Award, Tyag Murt Mata Ramai Ambedkar Samman, Icons of India Award, World Parliament International Award and the White Coat Ceremony honour by Donate Life, USA. In recognition of his outstanding contributions, Mangalore University awarded him the distinguished title of One in Millions.