

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR LEGAL RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS



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PUBLIC AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION OF ORGAN DONATION LAWS IN INDIA: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

In India, organ donation and transplantation are governed by a thorough legal and administrative structure designed to safeguard donors and recipients, control the removal, storage, and transplantation of human organs and tissues, and stop commercial transactions and the illicit organ trafficking. The Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994 (THOTA), as amended, the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Rules, 2014, and the institutional procedures set up for the law's execution are the main pieces of legislation controlling this sector. Nonetheless, the public does not necessarily assure that members of its legal protections, safeguards, safeguards, safeguards, safeguards, safeguards, safeguards. Public may be willing to participate in the public perspective's perceptions of perceptions of perceptions of perceptions of perceptions, institutional conformity. In order to investigate public understanding and perception of the legislative framework governing organ donation in India, the current study used a non-doctrinal, empirical, and descriptive research approach. Google Forms were circulated. Google Forms were circulated. The study includes 105 responses to the main survey questions. The data were analysed using descriptive percentages and interpreted in relation to perceptions of the effectiveness of the legal framework in preventing illegal organ trade and trafficking, awareness of the legal framework, familiarity with THOTA, perceived compliance of hospitals and transplant centers, concerns regarding organ donation, trust in medical professionals, and willingness to consider donor registration. The study illustrates the difference between a general understanding of the existence of organ donation regulations and in-depth familiarity with the particular legal structure. It also shows doubt about trust, institutional compliance, and the effectiveness of legal protections.

1. INTRODUCTION

Organ donation and transplantation comprise an important topic at the intersection of law, medicine, ethics and society. The transplantation of human organs can give life-saving treatment to persons suffering from serious organ failure. Consent, physical integrity, medical decision-making, authorization, institutional responsibility, equality of access, and the avoidance of exploitation are all complicated issues that are brought up by the removal and transplantation of human organs. As a result, organ transplantation is not just a medical procedure; it is also subject to legal regulations. India has put in place a legal framework to control organ transplantation and donation. The Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act of 1994 is the main piece of law. The law aims to stop commercial transactions in human organs and tissues while regulating the removal, storage, and transplantation of human organs and tissues for medicinal purposes. The Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues (Amendment) Act, 2011 and the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Rules, 2014 further reinforced the legal framework.¹

The legal framework provides criteria governing the removal and transplantation of organs, consent and authorization, registration of hospitals and transplant centers, certification of brain-stem death, regulation of live and deceased donor, and limits on commercial dealings. Therefore, the framework aims to strike a compromise between the need to safeguard donors and recipients from exploitation and the necessity to enable legal transplantation. Institutional structures such as the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization (NOTTO), State Organ and Tissue Transplant Organizations (SOTTOs), and Regional Organ and Tissue Transplant Organizations (ROTOs) facilitate the implementation of the legal framework.²

Under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's Directorate General of Health Services, NOTTO carries out tasks related to the National Organ Transplant Program and THOTA implementation. In addition, it oversees organ distribution and procurement procedures and keeps a national register. Even with this institutional and legal framework in place, public involvement is crucial to the success of organ donation. People might be willing to donate organs, but they might not be aware

of the relevant legislation, the donor registration process, or the protections against abuse. In a similar vein, public trust may be impacted by worries about medical facilities, organ trafficking, and how donated organs are handled.

¹ The Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994, Act No. 42 of 1994.

² National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, materials relating to organ donation and transplantation.

The significance of public awareness has grown as the Government continues to implement institutional reforms and awareness initiatives. NOTTO has launched public awareness efforts, including campaigns for organ donation and observance of Indian Organ Donation Day. There is also a national platform available for registering pledges for the donation of organs and tissues after death. A recent update is the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues (Amendment) Rules, 2025, which modified the stipulations for corneal transplantation centres by making the use of a specular microscope optional. The Government indicated that this change would aid in the registration of smaller centres and enhance access to corneal transplantation services.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How aware is the public about the legal framework surrounding organ donation and transplantation in India?
2. What is the level of familiarity among respondents with the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act of 1994?
3. How do respondents view the adherence of hospitals and transplant centers to the legal requirements related to organ transplantation?
4. What key concerns do respondents express regarding organ donation in India?
5. To what degree do respondents have confidence in hospitals and medical professionals to adhere to organ donation laws appropriately?
6. What percentage of respondents would be open to registering as organ donors at some point in their lives?
7. How do respondents assess the effectiveness of current laws in curbing illegal organ trade and trafficking?

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study is to examine the level of public awareness and perception regarding the legal framework governing organ donation and transplantation in India. The study aims to assess the extent to which the respondents are aware of the legal provisions regulating organ donation, particularly the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994, and to understand their familiarity with its purpose and regulatory requirements. It further seeks to examine the public perception of the compliance of hospitals and transplant centres with the applicable legal requirements and to identify the major concerns associated with organ

donation, including concerns relating to misuse, illegal organ trade, lack of awareness and medical or procedural issues. The study also aims to assess the level of trust placed by the public in hospitals and medical professionals in implementing organ donation laws and to examine the willingness of individuals to register as organ donors. Finally, the study seeks to understand public perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the existing legal framework in preventing illegal organ trade and trafficking and, based on the empirical findings, to identify areas where greater legal awareness, transparency, institutional compliance and public confidence may be required.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a non-doctrinal and empirical research methodology to examine public awareness and perception regarding the legal framework governing organ donation and transplantation in India. The study is primarily based on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire prepared using Google Forms. The questionnaire was circulated among respondents through an online platform, and a total of 105 responses were considered for the study. Secondary sources were used to provide the legal and institutional context. These include the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994, the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Rules, 2014, official information published by NOTTO and government reports concerning organ donation and transplantation.

5. LEGAL FRAMEWORK GOVERNING ORGAN DONATION IN INDIA

5.1 Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994³

The Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994 is the principal legislation governing organ donation and transplantation in India. The legislation was enacted to regulate the removal, storage and transplantation of human organs for therapeutic purposes and to prevent commercial dealings in human organs. The statutory framework was subsequently strengthened through the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues (Amendment) Act, 2011. The amended framework also deals with tissues and provides additional safeguards concerning transplantation. The Act regulates the circumstances in which human organs and tissues may be removed and transplanted. It provides legal requirements relating to consent, authorization and transplantation and creates mechanisms for regulating hospitals and transplant centres.

³ The Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994.

An important feature of the legislation is the recognition of brain-stem death for the purposes of organ donation. This provides the legal basis for deceased organ donation following appropriate certification in accordance with the statutory framework. The Act also regulates living donation and transplantation involving persons who do not fall within permitted categories. In appropriate circumstances, authorization by the Authorisation Committee is required. The purpose of such scrutiny is to ensure compliance with legal requirements and to reduce the possibility of coercion, exploitation or commercial transactions.

The Act further prohibits commercial dealings in human organs and tissues. This is a fundamental aspect of the regulatory framework because organ transplantation must occur for lawful therapeutic purposes rather than as a commercial transaction.

5.2 Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Rules, 2014

The Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Rules, 2014 supplement the Act by prescribing detailed procedures, forms and institutional requirements relating to organ and tissue donation and transplantation. The Rules are important because they translate broad statutory requirements into administrative and procedural requirements for hospitals, transplant centres, authorities and other stakeholders. Their implementation is therefore directly relevant to public perceptions of whether the legal framework operates effectively.⁴

5.3 Registration and Regulation of Hospitals

Hospitals and medical institutions involved in organ removal, storage or transplantation are subject to the regulatory requirements prescribed under the legal framework. Institutional registration and compliance are important safeguards because transplantation involves vulnerable donors and recipients and requires medical and legal oversight. The survey therefore specifically examined how respondents perceive the compliance of hospitals and transplant centres with legal requirements. However, these perceptions cannot independently establish whether a particular hospital is legally compliant.

5.4 Prevention of Commercial Dealings and Organ Trafficking

The prevention of commercial dealings in human organs is one of the central objectives of the statutory framework. The law establishes restrictions and penalties designed to deter unauthorized removal, transplantation and commercial transactions involving human organs

⁴ The Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Rules, 2014.

and tissues. Public concern regarding organ trafficking is particularly relevant to organ donation because fear of misuse or illegal commercialization can influence willingness to participate in donation.

5.5 Institutional Framework

NOTTO is the apex national organisation responsible for implementing the National Organ Transplant Programme and carrying out activities under THOTA. It maintains the national registry of donors and recipients and facilitates coordination relating to organ procurement and distribution. The institutional network also includes ROTTOs and SOTTOs. These organisations assist in coordination, awareness, registration, allocation and implementation of the national transplantation framework. NOTTO has also undertaken awareness campaigns and operates a portal through which citizens can register pledges to donate organs and tissues after death.

6. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The legal and institutional framework governing organ donation in India continues to develop. Recent developments demonstrate that organ transplantation regulation is not static and that government policy continues to respond to practical requirements within the transplantation system.

The Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues (Amendment) Rules, 2025 were notified on 6 November 2025⁵. The amendment modified Form 15 of the 2014 Rules in relation to corneal transplantation centres by making the requirement concerning a specular microscope optional. The amendment was introduced under the rule-making power contained in the Act and represents a recent adjustment of institutional requirements.

The Government has also undertaken measures aimed at facilitating access to the deceased-donor transplantation system. NOTTO has reported reforms including removal of the domicile condition for registration of recipients seeking deceased-donor organs, removal of the upper age limit for such registration and removal of registration fees.

Public awareness has also remained an important component of the national programme. The Government has continued campaigns relating to organ donation and has observed Indian Organ Donation Day. The 2025–26 Annual Report records a year-long awareness campaign under the name “Angdaan – Jeevan Sanjeevani Abhiyaan”.

⁵ Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, **Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Rules (Amendment), 2025**

Official government reporting also indicates continuing growth in transplant activity while recognising that organ availability remains an important challenge. These developments make public awareness particularly important because the legal system requires public participation and confidence for the deceased-donor system to function effectively.

The recent developments therefore provide an important background to the present survey. The study does not merely examine awareness of a historical statute; it considers public perception within an evolving regulatory and institutional environment.

7. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The empirical data collected for the present study provides an understanding of the level of public awareness, knowledge and perception regarding the legal framework governing organ donation in India. A total of 105 responses were considered for the study. The collected responses were analysed using percentages and graphical representations. The analysis focuses on respondents' awareness of the legal framework, familiarity with the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994, understanding of its purpose, perception of institutional compliance, concerns relating to organ donation, trust in medical institutions, willingness to become organ donors and perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the law in preventing illegal organ trade and trafficking.

The findings relating to awareness of the legal framework indicate that a majority of respondents have some awareness of the fact that organ donation and transplantation in India are governed by specific laws and regulations. However, the responses also demonstrate that general awareness does not necessarily mean detailed knowledge of the applicable legal provisions. This distinction is important for the present study because the existence of legislation alone may not ensure that members of the public understand their rights, responsibilities, consent requirements or the safeguards applicable to organ donation.

The responses concerning familiarity with the legal framework further demonstrate a variation in the level of legal knowledge among respondents. While a proportion of respondents reported being familiar with the framework, a considerable number indicated that they were only somewhat familiar or not familiar with it. This suggests that awareness of organ donation may be greater than awareness of the legal mechanisms regulating it. From an empirical legal research perspective, this finding indicates the need to examine not only whether people have heard about organ donation but also whether they possess sufficient information to understand the legal protections associated with the process.

The responses relating specifically to the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act,

1994 reveal a similar pattern. Although some respondents were aware of the legislation, a substantial proportion either did not know about the Act or were uncertain about their awareness of it. The responses concerning the primary purpose of the Act are particularly significant because a considerable proportion of respondents selected the option indicating that they did not know its primary purpose. This demonstrates a gap between awareness of organ donation as a social and medical issue and understanding of the legislation designed to regulate it. The finding is relevant because knowledge of the purpose of THOTA is important for understanding the safeguards against unauthorised transplantation and commercial dealings in human organs.

The data concerning hospitals and transplant centres indicates that 63.8% of respondents considered their compliance with legal requirements to be either highly effective or effective. At the same time, 28.6% of respondents were not sure about the effectiveness of such compliance. This result reflects a relatively positive perception among respondents but also indicates uncertainty regarding the actual functioning of legal safeguards within medical institutions. Since the survey measures public perception rather than independently verified institutional compliance, these responses should be understood as an indication of public confidence and perception rather than evidence establishing the actual level of compliance by hospitals or transplant centres.

The survey also examined the major concerns associated with organ donation. The responses indicate that concerns relating to possible misuse and illegal or unauthorised practices form an important part of public perception. Other concerns included lack of awareness and medical or procedural issues. These responses demonstrate that willingness to participate in organ donation may be influenced not only by personal attitudes but also by confidence in the regulatory and institutional safeguards governing the process. The presence of such concerns highlights the importance of transparent procedures, accessible information and effective implementation of legal safeguards.

The findings regarding trust in hospitals and medical professionals are also significant. While 46.7% of respondents expressed trust in hospitals and medical professionals in relation to organ donation, 36.2% selected “Maybe”, indicating uncertainty, while 17.1% did not express trust. The relatively high proportion of respondents expressing uncertainty suggests that public confidence cannot be understood simply through a yes-or-no approach. Trust may depend upon respondents' knowledge of the transplantation process, perceptions of institutional transparency and awareness of the safeguards provided by law.

The responses relating to willingness to register as an organ donor demonstrate that a

considerable proportion of respondents are open to participating in organ donation. Approximately 40% stated that they would consider registering as organ donors, while additional respondents selected options such as “Probably” or “Maybe”. At the same time, some respondents indicated that they were not sure or would not register. This suggests that willingness to donate exists among a substantial section of respondents, but uncertainty and hesitation remain. The findings indicate that improving awareness of the legal process and explaining the safeguards applicable to donation may be relevant to encouraging informed participation.

The final part of the survey examined respondents’ perception of the effectiveness of existing law in preventing illegal organ trade and trafficking. The responses show that 56.2% considered the legal framework to be either highly effective or effective, while 31.4% considered it moderately effective and 12.4% considered it ineffective. These findings indicate that more than half of the respondents have a positive perception of the legal framework's ability to address illegal organ trade. However, the proportion selecting “moderately effective” also indicates that a significant section of respondents believes that the existence of legislation does not necessarily mean that the problem has been completely addressed.

Overall, the empirical findings reveal a distinction between general awareness of organ donation and detailed awareness of the legal framework regulating it. Respondents generally recognise the importance of organ donation and demonstrate a degree of confidence in the legal and medical system, but uncertainty remains regarding specific legislation, institutional compliance and safeguards against misuse. The findings therefore indicate that public perception is influenced by both awareness and trust. Greater legal literacy, transparent institutional practices and accessible information regarding donor registration and legal safeguards may contribute to a better-informed public understanding of organ donation in India.

The data also demonstrates that the legal framework should not be examined only from a statutory perspective. A non-doctrinal approach provides insight into how the law is understood by the people whom it affects. The responses in this study show that the effectiveness of organ donation laws, from the perspective of public participation, is connected with awareness, confidence and willingness to engage with the transplantation system. However, because the study is based on a relatively small non-probability sample, the findings represent the perceptions of the respondents surveyed and cannot be treated as statistically representative of the entire Indian population. The results nevertheless provide useful empirical insight into areas requiring greater public awareness and further research.

8. SUGGESTIONS AND REFORMS

There is a need to strengthen the organ donation system in India through greater public awareness, effective implementation of existing laws and improved medical infrastructure. Awareness programmes should be conducted by government authorities, hospitals and educational institutions to educate people about the importance, procedure and legal aspects of organ donation. The registration process for organ donation should be made simple, accessible and transparent through online platforms and healthcare institutions. Hospitals should be provided with adequate infrastructure, trained medical professionals, organ retrieval teams and transplantation facilities, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. Proper counselling should also be provided to the families of potential donors so that they understand the medical, legal and ethical aspects of organ donation. Transparency in organ allocation and transplantation should be improved through clear procedures and effective monitoring mechanisms. Strict measures should be taken to prevent illegal organ trade, exploitation and fraudulent practices. Reliable data regarding donor registrations, organ donations, transplantation and waiting lists should also be maintained for effective policy planning. Greater communication within families should be encouraged so that an individual's decision regarding organ donation is known to their relatives. These measures can help improve public confidence, reduce misconceptions and contribute to a more accessible, transparent and effective organ donation system in India.

9. CONCLUSION

Organ donation is a significant component of the healthcare system because it provides an opportunity to save and improve the lives of individuals suffering from irreversible organ failure. India has established a legal and institutional framework to regulate organ donation and transplantation and to prevent unethical practices such as commercial organ trading. However, the existence of legislation alone is not sufficient to ensure effective organ donation. The findings of the present non-doctrinal study indicate that public awareness, knowledge of legal provisions, willingness to donate, family support, social beliefs and trust in the transplantation system have an important influence on people's attitudes towards organ donation. Although many people may have a positive understanding of the concept, misconceptions regarding the donation process, fear, lack of adequate information and uncertainty about how organs are allocated can discourage individuals from registering as donors.

The study also highlights the importance of improving communication between healthcare institutions and the public. Many potential donors and their families may not have sufficient knowledge regarding donor registration, brain-stem death, consent procedures and the legal safeguards governing transplantation. Proper counselling by trained professionals can help families understand these issues and make informed decisions. Awareness programmes should therefore be conducted not only during special campaigns but also through schools, colleges, hospitals, social media and community-based programmes. Educational institutions can play an important role in developing awareness among young people and encouraging informed discussions about organ donation.

Another important area requiring attention is the accessibility and efficiency of transplantation services. Adequate infrastructure, trained medical personnel, organ retrieval facilities and transplantation centres are necessary to ensure that donated organs are utilised effectively. Differences in healthcare facilities between urban and rural areas may also affect access to transplantation. Strengthening transplantation facilities and improving coordination between hospitals and relevant authorities can help reduce delays and prevent the wastage of donated organs. Transparent and properly monitored allocation procedures are equally important for maintaining public confidence in the system.

The legal framework governing organ donation must also be supported by effective enforcement and institutional monitoring. Measures to prevent illegal organ trade, coercion, fraudulent documentation and other unethical practices should be continuously strengthened. At the same time, legitimate donors and recipients should be protected through clear procedures and appropriate safeguards. Maintaining accurate and updated data regarding donor registrations, organ availability, transplantation and waiting lists can assist authorities in identifying gaps and developing evidence-based policies.

The study further demonstrates the importance of family involvement in organ donation. Even when an individual has expressed a willingness to donate, family members may play an important role during the actual donation process. Encouraging individuals to communicate their wishes to their families can therefore reduce uncertainty at critical stages. Public campaigns should focus not only on encouraging people to become donors but also on explaining the complete donation process and addressing common fears and misconceptions. In conclusion, improving organ donation in India requires a combination of legal enforcement, public awareness, medical infrastructure, transparency and community participation. The findings of this study suggest that increasing knowledge about organ donation and strengthening public trust can contribute to greater acceptance of the donation process. The

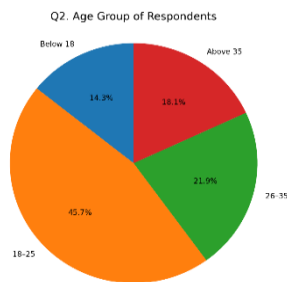
objective should not merely be to increase the number of registered donors but also to ensure that the entire system functions ethically, transparently and efficiently. With stronger implementation of existing laws, better healthcare facilities, effective counselling and sustained awareness programmes, India can work towards developing a more accessible and reliable organ donation and transplantation system. Organ donation ultimately represents not only a medical procedure but also an important social responsibility, and a well-regulated system can help ensure that the willingness of donors is translated into meaningful benefits for patients in need of life-saving.

10. REFERENCES

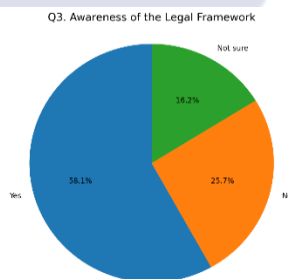
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ANNEXURE

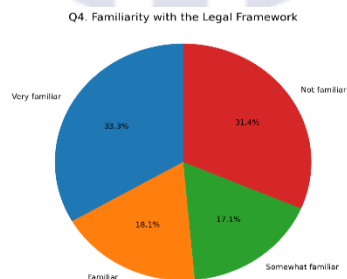
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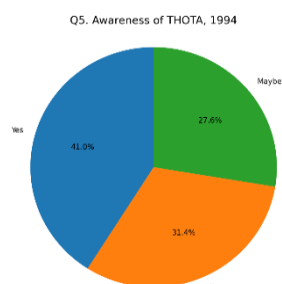
2. ARE YOU AWARE THAT ORGAN TRANSPLATATION AND DONATIONS IN INDIA ARE REGULATED BY A SPECIFIC LEGAL FRAMEWORK?



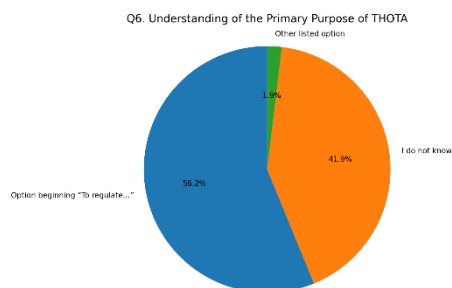
3. HOW FAMILIAR ARE YOU WTH THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK GOVERNING ORGAN DONATION IN INDIA ?



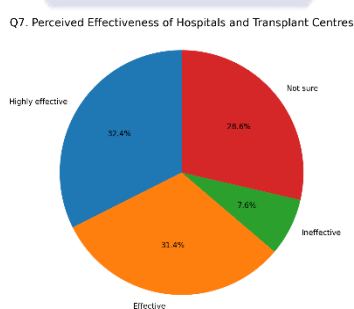
4. ARE YOU AWARE OF THE TRANSPLANTATION OF HUMAN ORGANS AND TISSUES ACT,1994?



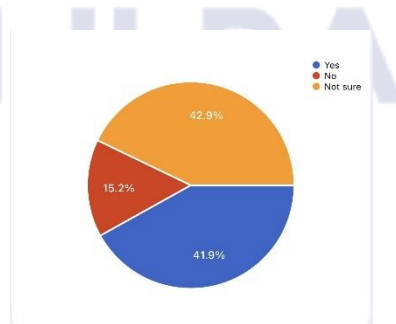
5. IN YOUR UNDERSTANDING, WHAT IS THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THOTA?



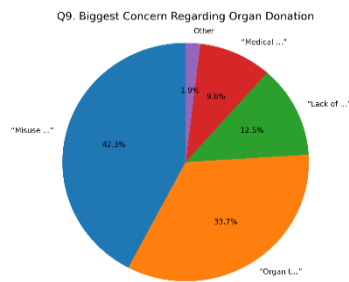
6. IN YOUR OPINION, HOW EFFECTIVELY DO HOSPITALS AND TRANSPLANT CENTRES FOLLOW THE LEGAL REQUIREMENTS GOVERNING ORGAN TRANSPLANTATION IN INDIA?



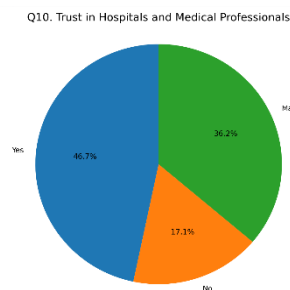
7. DO YOU BELIEVE THAT ORGAN DONATION LAWS PROVIDE SUFFICIENT SAFEGUARDS AGAINST ILLEGAL ORGAN TRADE AND EXPLOITATION?



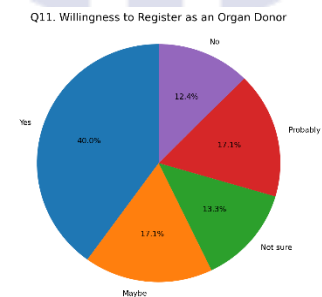
8. WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CONCERN REGARDING ORGAN DONATION IN INDIA?



9. DO YOU TRUST HOSPITALS AND MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS TO FOLLOW ORGAN DONATION LAWS PROPERLY?



10. WOULD YOU CONSIDER REGISTERING AS AN ORGAN DONOR DURING YOUR LIFETIME?



11. DO YOU BELIEVE THAT EXISTING LAW IS EFFECTIVE IN PREVENTING ILLEGAL ORGAN TRADE AND ORGAN TRAFFICKING IN INDIA?

