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Understanding public attitudes towards organ donation: A media analysis

Research Summary

Social research

Number: 67/2013

Following public consultations and the passing of the Human Transplantation (Wales) Bill in July 2013, a 'deemed consent' system for organ donation will be brought into effect in Wales on 1st December 2015 following a targeted communications campaign by the Welsh Government. This research report was commissioned by the Welsh Government in response to the findings of the Public Attitudes to Organ Donation: Baseline Survey 2012 (PAODBS; Welsh Government, 2012) which identified regional differences in relation to knowledge of the proposed changes in legislation and attitudes towards the new legislation that were not accounted for by socio-economic or demographic differences.

- A retrospective content analysis of Welsh media coverage of organ donation legislation covering the period from October 2011 to April 2013 inclusive was carried out primarily on sources from television and newspapers in Wales, with an exploratory analysis of social media also being conducted. In addition to analysing message valence (positive or negative), source credibility and argument strength, an analysis of key themes (e.g., religious themes, political themes) identified within the sources was also conducted.
- Overall, the coverage of organ donation legislation in Welsh media on television and in newspapers has been broadly balanced. The regional differences in media reporting that do exist do not explain the attitudes displayed by respondents to the PAODBS (2012). In conclusion, this report has indicated that regional differences in knowledge of, and attitudes towards, organ donation legislation do not appear to reflect differences in the presentation of information relating to organ donation legislation across different types of media in Wales.

Dadansoddi ar gyfer Polisi



Analysis for Policy

Key Findings

1. Analysis of television coverage in English and Welsh languages broadcasting across Wales on national television showed more positive than negative valence, with the pattern of reporting remaining broadly similar across English only, English and Welsh, and Welsh only sources. This suggests that regional differences in knowledge of, and attitudes towards, organ donation legislation are not due to differences in the way in which television stations in Wales convey information relating to organ donation legislation.
2. Themes relating to political and statistical health issues were the most dominant themes identified in television sources. Whilst both themes featured extensively in positive and negative items, political themes featured in more negative stories whilst statistical health themes were found in more positive stories. The television coverage analysed for this report shows a prevalence of factually objective stories relating to the organ donation legislation rather than religious, moral or emotionally-laden themes.
3. Newspaper analysis provided mixed comparisons with the PAODBS. A balance of positive and negative items were identified in the Western Mail (accounting for just under half of items analysed) and in regional newspapers in North Wales. In contrast, a greater proportion of positive reporting was identified in the Swansea Bay and Mid & West Wales regional newspapers, and a greater proportion of negative reporting in the Cardiff & South-East Wales region. Positive themes reflected emotional, statistical and political information whilst negative themes reflected political, moral and religious themes.

4. The higher than average number of published letters from readers in the Western Mail and in newspapers within the Cardiff & South-East Wales region accounted for a high proportion of negative items in these data. Readers' letters primarily reflect moral themes and, to a lesser extent, political and religious themes.

5. Overall, the coverage of organ donation legislation in Welsh media on television and in newspapers has been broadly balanced, with some regional exceptions. However, these in themselves do not explain the attitudes displayed by respondents to the PAODBS (2012). In conclusion, regional differences in knowledge of, and attitudes towards, organ donation legislation do not appear to reflect differences in the presentation of information relating to organ donation legislation across different types of media in Wales.

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