



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO

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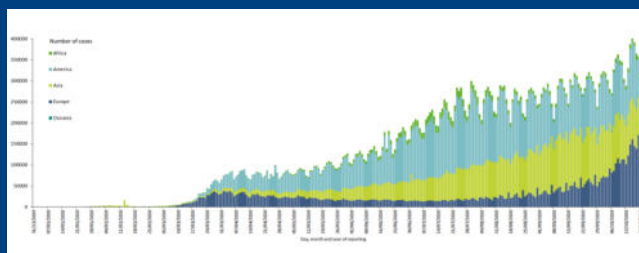
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Problems of ethics during the COVID-19 pandemic



Distribution of COVID-19 cases worldwide, as of 20 October 2020

IN ITALY MORE THAN 500,000



TRAGIC CHOICES AND CRITERIONS

- Sometimes hospitals have not been equipped enough, especially in terms of life support machines, and this obliged doctors and health professionals to make tragic choices
- Choices based on which criterion?
- Lottery, First-come first served, Favoring the worst-off, Maximizing total benefits, Promoting and rewarding social usefulness
- Ordinary citizens

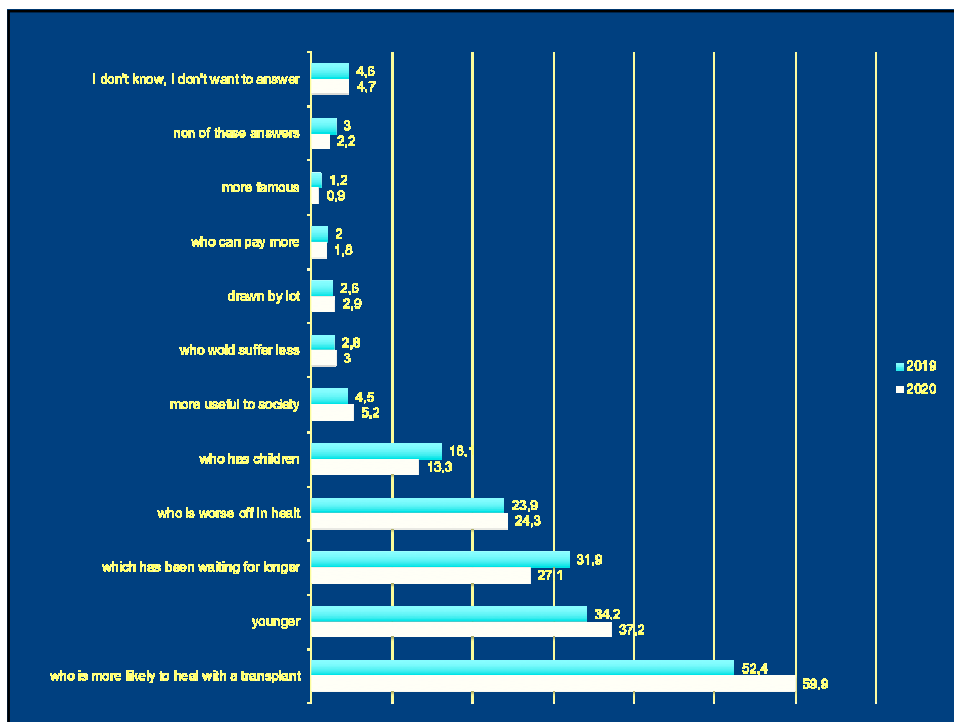
Our research

- In October 2019 we asked a representative sample of 1,012 Italians a question about organ transplant relating to tragic choices in contexts of scarce resources, and the same question was also re-posed in April 2020 to 1,009 Italians, also to verify if and how the pandemic emergency had changed the attitude of our fellow citizens. During the follow-up of the research, in April 2020, we asked a further question enquiring specifically the problems posed by the pandemic.

First dilemma (2019, 2020)

Let's examine a concrete case. Three people are at risk of dying and all of them are in urgent need of a liver transplant. There is only one liver suitable for transplantation for the three patients. To which patient should the only available liver be transplanted? (multiple responses allowed)

The liver must be transplanted to the patient ...



Most likely to heal with transplantation

- Differences between 2019 and 2020 generally insignificant and moreover the percentages of placed on the same scale
- The answer "**most likely to heal with transplantation**" is the one most frequently provided
- It falls within the category of utilitarian responses but not without empathy

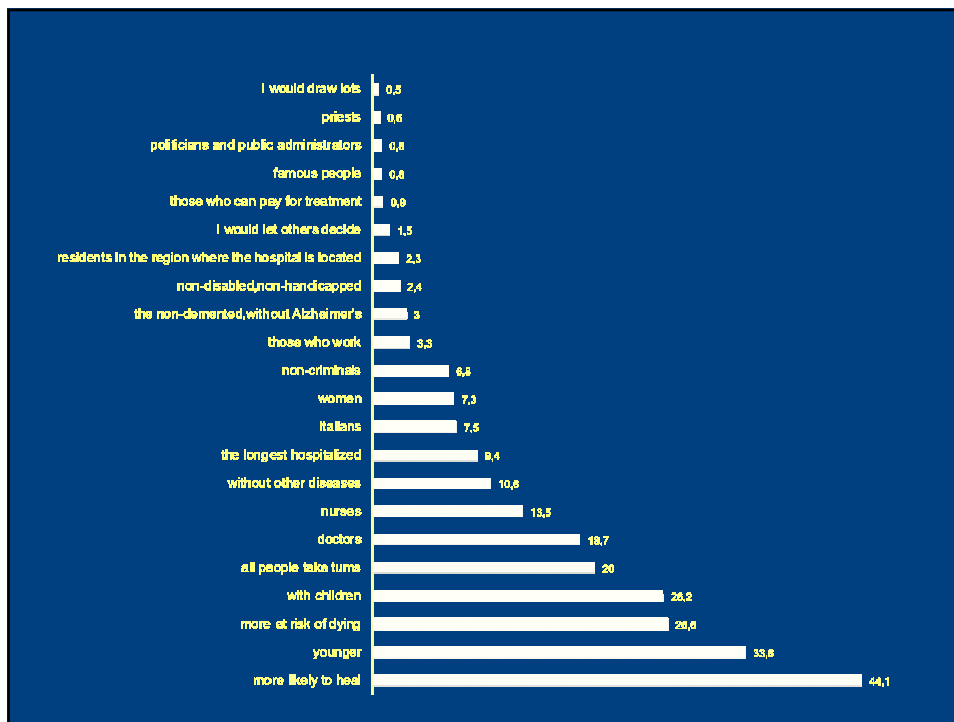
Younger

- The second most frequent response is **to the "younger" patient**
- Ageism?
- The young man is in life credit?

- **“who has been waiting for the longest”** and **“drawn by lot”**: formal justice
- **"who has children", "more useful to society", “who can pay more”**: social usefulness

Second dilemma (2020)

Let's talk now about the coronavirus or Covid-19 pandemic. If you had been or were a doctor in a hospital with many hospitalized patients in serious condition from or with the coronavirus, and if you had or had available only one machine providing assisted breathing for every three life-threatening patients, who would you have chosen or would choose to guarantee that machine? Please indicate no more than 5 of the answers listed below. I would choose the person ...



- **"most likely to heal"** is the answer given most frequently: utilitarian and empathy
- **"those without other diseases"** utilitarian criterion too
- but the percentage drops for the **"non-demented, without Alzheimer's"** and for the **"non-disabled, non-handicapped"**

- **“younger” response is second in frequency. It is provided by a higher percentage of subjects in the 18-25 age group**
- **20% "to all people in turn": standardizing or equaling?**
- **“who work”, “with children”, “to doctors” “to nurses”: social usefulness**
- **and, what about "to famous people", "to politicians and public administrators"?**

CONCLUSIONS 1

- **Would be important to know which kind of ethical choices citizens should take in conditions of discrepancy between therapeutic needs and available resources, just like what happened with the Covid-19 situation.**
- **Political choices for the allocation of scarce resources should also be made considering both the opinions of bioethics experts or health professionals, and confronting the opinions of citizens.**

CONCLUSIONS 2

- We asked a representative sample of Italians questions about tragic choices in this field, before and after the pandemic.
- The sample gave answers especially utilitarian but not without empathy.
- The answers showed even more compassion post the beginning of the Covid pandemic.
- Other answers follow social usefulness criterion.
- Few are according lottery, first-come first served criterions, and very few persons answer that they would choose a person who can pay more, a famous person, or a politician.

GRAZIE

