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Research and Innovation Division,
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Selangor,
Puncak Alam Campus

QUALITATIVE STUDY: EXPLORATION OF BLOOD DONATION AWARENESS AMONG NON-BLOOD DONORS

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ABSTRACT

Donating blood is a humanitarian act with lifesaving implications. Blood transfusion saves lives and helps recover many patients, as every blood component is beneficial. The general public is urged to respond to the call of blood banks to donate blood to enable them to maintain a continuous supply of blood for the vital use of patients nationwide. This study explores the level of blood donation awareness amongst non-donors and the factors that hinder them from voluntarily donating blood. Four focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted among non-blood donors. The discussions were held in separate, closed rooms. All of the sessions were recorded with the participants' permission. The discussions were conducted in the local language, and the verbatim was later translated into English. Most non-donor participants professed an awareness of the importance of donating blood to save an ill person. However, those with daily work commitments do not voluntarily donate blood mainly due to the lack of donation, such as it causing weakness and a variety of health problems. Fear is also a common factor stated by the participants, including fear of the needle, fear of blood, or a general fear of the whole blood donation process. Concerning creating awareness, some participants recommended using short films/videos or advertisements that could stir an emotional reaction. Other hindering factors are related to the common myths, fears and superstitions about blood on voluntary blood donation campaigns that were very limited. Findings indicate a need for comprehensive strategies to address these barriers and promote voluntary blood donation.

Keywords: awareness; blood donation; blood bank; focus group discussion

INTRODUCTION

Blood transfusion is a fundamental medical procedure that saves millions of lives annually. It is vital in treating life-threatening conditions, enhancing the quality of life for critically ill patients, and supporting complex medical and surgical interventions. Additionally, blood transfusions play a critical role in maternal and child healthcare, where they are often needed during childbirth complications, and during human-induced disasters, where they are crucial for treating injuries and shock. These lifesaving benefits highlight the increasing need for a sufficient, quality blood supply for clinical treatments.

Many countries, including Malaysia, are grappling with the urgent challenge of meeting the escalating demand for quality blood supplies. According to the United Kingdom Blood Services and Norfolk (2013), approximately 80% of blood transfusions are performed to address low haemoglobin (Hb) levels rather than active bleeding [1]. Research by Jain and Gupta (2012) found that 29.6% of individuals would only donate blood to assist family members or friends in need [2]. In 2015, Malaysia's National Blood Centre anticipated that over 10% of Malaysians would donate blood, but only 2.2% reported doing so. The Malaysian Director General of Health (2010) noted that only two in 1000 eligible donors (2:1000) in Malaysia donated blood, creating a pressing challenge for blood bank services to maintain a safe and sufficient supply [3].

Despite widespread blood donation campaigns, participation remains low due to limited public understanding [4-6]. Fear and lack of self-awareness are significant factors influencing an individual's decision to donate blood. Awareness is often heightened through personal experiences, such as a family member requiring a blood transfusion [7]. Bilal et al. (2015) reported that 83.7% of individuals would donate blood only if a family member, relative, or friend needed a transfusion, indicating that awareness is often situation-specific and limited to personal connections [8].

Voluntary donors differ from non-donors in demographics, altruism, intention, anxiety, and perception [9]. Further studies are necessary to determine if these findings apply to non-donors in other

countries. Understanding the reasons healthy, eligible individuals refuse to donate blood is not just important; it's crucial to addressing this issue. This research is a significant step towards that understanding.

This study delves into the barriers to blood donation among eligible non-donors, particularly when family members are critically ill. The findings aim to illuminate the issue and inspire strategies that can significantly increase blood donor participation. Our goal is to surpass the 10% national target set by Malaysia's National Blood Centre, and this study's insights can pave the way for a brighter future in blood donation.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This qualitative study was conducted among caregivers of intensive care unit patients at a public hospital in Sabah, Malaysia. Participants were healthy caregivers eligible to donate blood but with no prior donation history. Four focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with 11 participants, each lasting 15 to 30 minutes in a comfortable hospital setting. The discussions were guided by a moderator using a semi-structured format, with consistent questions across all groups (Table 1). Participants were selected through purposive sampling until thematic saturation was achieved. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation.

Table 1: Interview Topics

Topic	Questions
Awareness	Have you heard about blood donation? What are your views on it?
Knowledge	What are the criteria for donating blood? Why is blood donation important?
Barriers	What prevents you from donating blood?
Suggestions	What would motivate you to donate blood?

Interviews were recorded in the local language, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English. Data analysis followed three steps:

1. **Transcription and Validation:** Verbatim transcripts were reviewed by participants to ensure accuracy and reliability.
2. **Coding and Indexing:** Transcripts were coded systematically (e.g., FG1-L for male participants in the first group) to facilitate analysis.
3. **Thematic Analysis:** Data were analysed through repeated readings to identify themes and sub-themes related to blood donation awareness, barriers, and suggestions.

This study was approved by the National Medical Research Register (NMRR) and the Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Selangor.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participant Demographics A total of 11 participants were interviewed, comprising six females (54%) and five males (45%). Four participants (36%) had tertiary education, and seven (63%) worked in the private sector. Age distribution showed six participants (54%) aged 18-29 years and five (45%) aged 30-40 years (Table 2).

Table 2: Demographic data of participants

Category	FGD 1	FGD 2	FGD 3	FGD 4	Total
Age (years)					

18-29	2	2	1	1	6 (54%)
30-40	1	1	1	2	5 (45%)
Education background					
Primary school	1	0	1	0	2 (19%)
Secondary school	1	2	0	2	5 (45%)
Diploma/degree	1	1	1	1	4 (36%)
Work sector					
Private sector	2	1	1	3	7 (63%)
Government sector	0	1	0	0	1 (9%)

Blood Donation Awareness Most participants (10 out of 11) were aware of the importance of blood donation, often learning about it during secondary school or hospital visits. They acknowledged blood donation as a noble act that helps save lives and promotes good moral values. Example responses included: “Donating blood is good for saving the lives of others” (FG2/P).

Knowledge of Blood Donation Participants demonstrated limited knowledge of eligibility criteria. They understood basic requirements, such as being healthy and chronic disease-free, but lacked comprehensive awareness. A participant stated: “Blood donors must be healthy, 18 years or older, and free of harmful diseases” (FG2/L).

Barriers to Blood Donation Three main barriers emerged:

1. **Fear:** Participants expressed fear of needles, blood, or health repercussions. For instance, “I’m afraid of needles” (FG1/L).
2. **Lack of Desire:** Many people lacked motivation to donate despite recognizing its importance. For example, “I’ve never felt the need to donate blood” (FG1/P).
3. **Time Constraints:** Busy schedules hindered participation. Example: “I’m too busy with work commitments” (FG4/P).

Suggestions for Improvement Participants suggested enhancing blood donation campaigns to focus on emotional appeals and accessibility. Specific recommendations included workplace blood drives, targeting government employees, and mobile units for rural areas. One participant noted: “Future campaigns should emphasize patient suffering to create awareness” (FG2/P).

Discussion Participants recognized the importance of blood donation but faced significant barriers. Fear was the most common deterrent, consistent with previous studies [10-11]. Limited knowledge about eligibility criteria also contributed, as supported by Shakeri et al. (2012) [5]. Emotional and logistical factors influenced participation, such as proximity and timing of donation drives. Addressing these barriers through targeted education, emotional engagement, and improved accessibility could increase donor rates. This aligns with findings by Pereira et al. (2016) and Umakanth et al. (2015), emphasizing the need for strategic communication and outreach efforts [4,12].

CONCLUSION

Addressing barriers such as fear, lack of desire, and logistical challenges is crucial for increasing blood donation rates. Effective strategies include emotional engagement in campaigns, workplace-based donation drives, and enhanced public education on eligibility and benefits. Future studies should expand to diverse demographics and incorporate quantitative assessments to develop tailored interventions. Collaborative efforts between government and private sectors are essential to ensure a sustainable blood supply.

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