



Original article

Perceptions of donors and recipients regarding blood donation



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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of this study was to identify the perceptions of blood donors and recipients regarding the act of donating blood.

Method: This descriptive study with a survey design focuses on subjective and cultural aspects. Twenty donors and 20 recipients in the blood bank at the time of data collection participated in the study. Interviews were analyzed according to deductive thematic analysis.

Results: Two themes emerged – perceptions of donors and perceptions of recipients. Both groups saw the act of donating blood as something positive, though donors associated their reports with the experiences of people close to them who needed blood transfusions, while the recipients associated donations with the maintenance of their lives as, for them, a blood transfusion was a necessary medical treatment.

Conclusions: Perceptions regarding blood donations are culturally constructed, as the participants associated knowledge acquired in the social world with moral issues and their life experiences. Hence, in addition to helping others, these individuals feel socially and morally rewarded.

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Introduction

In Brazil, blood donation is a voluntary and non-remunerated act. For this reason, blood banks need strategies to attract donors in order to provide blood products to hematology

patients. News reports usually show the difficulties blood banks face in recruiting donors, which results in a reduced supply of blood products.

With the intent to change this context, researchers conduct studies to verify the profile of donors and identify those who are most likely to agree to donate blood. A study conducted

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in a city in the interior of Paraná, Brazil identified 5700 donor candidates in 2008. Most were women (3477) and regular blood donors (3079), which revealed that a large number of donors were loyal to the facility.¹

Other studies using a qualitative methodology identified possible reasons for the donation of blood, such as solidarity, the need to replace supplies, the benefits of donating, and curiosity.² Donating is inherent to the life of humans even if such an act is not always perceived. Conversations regarding blood raise feelings in the social imaginary such as fear, pain, life and death, suffering and joy.³

Therefore, blood donation is an act that involves cultural elements that permeate social life. Culture is an association of information that characterizes an activity performed by an individual. Information cannot be described by biology but by members of a social group, who assign meanings to attitudes, which are then interpreted by researchers to corroborate knowledge from the social milieu.⁴

From this perspective, a health problem is not an individual understanding, but a consensual understanding, which has interpretative relevance in its social group of origin and can affect behavior and even the way people relate to each other when coping with a problem.⁵

Health providers specializing in transfusion therapy and hematology should be attentive to the context in which they are inserted, not only in respect to the clinical or organizational aspects within a blood therapy center but, more importantly, to understand the individuals to whom care is provided. Even if these individuals stay for less than 30 min in the service, they represent a cultural group that receives care from a healthcare facility, assigning meanings and having perceptions regarding the act of donating blood.

Note that healthcare delivery should also be based on the perceptions of patients regarding a given phenomenon, be it of a biological or psychosocial nature, as this may directly influence the maintenance of donation practices. Hence, the objective of this article was to seek an understanding of the perceptions of donors and recipients regarding the act of donating blood.

Method

This descriptive study with a survey design focused on subjective aspects,⁶ highlighting cultural features that emerged in the interviews of the participants. The Anthropology of Health⁷ was the theoretical framework used, based upon which, culture involves the dimensions that directly influence the behaviors of individuals regarding their health, whether related to self-care or care delivered by another. The cultural perception concerning blood donation of people using a blood bank is the focus of this study.

This study was conducted in a blood bank in the state of Pará, Brazil where 40 participants were recruited: 20 blood donors and 20 recipients who attended the facility from January to December 2011. Even though the data were collected in 2011, the authors believe that the perceptions presented here represent the current context of donors and recipients from the facility under study. Therefore, the publication of these

results in the current context is justified based on the scientific maturation of the researchers.

Donors were interviewed after blood donation and recipients were approached during blood transfusions. Note that members of both groups were older than 18 years old and signed informed consent forms before being included in the study.

The interviews were held in a private room provided to the researchers in the facility's premises. A questionnaire addressing sociodemographic data and an interview script addressing perceptions regarding blood donation were applied, audio recorded and later transcribed for data analysis. The meetings lasted 20 min on average.

Sociodemographic data were analyzed according to descriptive statistics. Transcriptions were analyzed using deductive thematic analysis and classified into common categories according to their frequency and relevance and later organized into thematic units.⁸

This study is in agreement with resolution 466/12 of the National Council of Health that provides "Regulatory Guidelines and Standards for Research Involving Human Subjects".⁹ The project was submitted to and approved by the Institutional Review Board at HEMOPA (Blood Therapy and Hematology Foundation Center of Pará: Protocol No. 0541.0.000.324-11). The study's participants are identified by false names whenever excerpts of their reports are included in this paper.

Results

Characterization of participants

Of the 40 participants, 20 were donors and 20 were blood recipients. Among the donors, 55% were aged between 20 and 29 years old, 30% were aged between 30 and 39 years old, and 15% were between 40 and 49 years old. In regard to gender, 5% were men and 95% were women. Concerning religion, 45% were Catholic, 30% were Evangelical, 10% were Spiritualists and 15% did not report their religion. Half the donors were single, 40% were married and 5% were widowed. The monthly income was from two minimum wages for 70% of the participants, to between three and five times the minimum wage for 20%; 5% had a monthly income 6 to 10 times the minimum wage, while 5% did not report their income. In terms of education, 15% had bachelor's degrees, 15% attended some college, 20% had completed high school, 20% had incomplete high school, 20% had completed middle school, 20% had incomplete middle school, while 5% did not state their level of schooling. The reasons that the participants provided as to why they donated blood included voluntary donations for 35% of donors and 65% were asked to donate blood.

Among the 20 recipients, 50% were aged between 20 and 29 years old, 20% were between 30 and 39 years old, 20% between 40 and 49 years old, 5% between 50 and 59 years old, and 5% were between 60 and 69; most (65%) were men. Catholicism was the religion of 50% of the recipients, while 45% were Evangelical, and 5% did not report their religion. A total of 35% of the recipients were married and 65% were single. In terms of education, 10% had bachelor's degrees, 20% had completed

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