



New donors, loyal donors, and regular donors: Which motivations sustain blood donation? ☆



Paolo Guidi^{a,*}, Sara Alfieri^a, Elena Marta^a, Vincenzo Saturni^b

^a Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano, Italy

^b AVIS, National Blood Donors Association, Milan, Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 January 2014

Received in revised form 6 December 2014

Accepted 21 February 2015

Keywords:

Blood donation

Motivations

New donors

Loyal donors

Volunteer function inventory

ABSTRACT

Background: The present contribution aims to investigate the motivations underlying blood donation and to probe how these differ on the basis of number of donations and donors' gender.

Materials and methods: A total of 237 Italian donors (64.6% male) were administered a self-report questionnaire containing socio-demographic variables and Omoto and Snyder's Motivations for Volunteerism Scale adapted to blood donation.

Results and discussion: The results reveal: (a) significant differences between new donors (1–4 donations) and loyal donors (5–15 donations) as well as between new donors and regular donors (more than 16 donations) emerge with respect to social motivations and ego-protection, which increase proportionately to number of donations; (b) gender differences characterize all the motivations except those related to values; (c) value motivations do not vary either with respect to number of donations or to gender.

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1. Introduction

In many countries today blood donation is a voluntary, non-remunerated, and anonymous gesture. Specifically in the Italian context, donor recruitment and blood collection are guaranteed by voluntary associations (Law 107/1990; Law 219/2005). Among these associations, the largest and most important one is AVIS (*Associazione Volontari Italiani Sangue* [Association of Italian Blood Donors]), which currently includes more than 3,000,000 volunteer donors distributed throughout the country.

The act of donating blood has been studied in the literature as one of the most important gestures of “pure altruism” [1–5] since the person who donates blood does not know the person who will receive it and, therefore,

cannot benefit from any form of compensation (by the term *altruism* we mean the motivation to help another person with no prospect of personal compensation for those who offer assistance). Research on this topic has concentrated mainly on the *personality characteristics* that may be predictive of this particular type of gift [6–13] but it overlooks additional, important variables. Only beginning in the late 1990s were other interpretive models applied to the donation gesture: these investigated additional variables such as, for example, the setting of the *motivational antecedents* to donation [14,15]. By the term *motivation* we mean the process of activating the individual in order to reach a goal (objective), taking into consideration the conditions of the environment in which s/he is situated. In line with this definition, the models mentioned earlier attempted to understand what drives volunteers to engage themselves and, in particular, what spurs blood donors toward the gesture of donation.

Among the different models referenced in the literature – most of which come from studies on volunteerism – Omoto and Snyder's Volunteer Function Inventory has also been used to predict this behavior [16,17].

☆ The findings' practical implications are discussed.

* Corresponding author. Department of Psychology, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, L. Go Gemelli, 1, 20123 Milano, Italy. Tel.: +39 0272342347; fax: + 0272342642.

E-mail address: paolo.guidi@unicatt.it (P. Guidi).

Table 1

Presentation of the 5 motivational functions and some examples of items on the questionnaire (Refs. 16 and 17).

Motivation typology	Meaning	Item example
Social motivation	Connected to the opportunity to meet and know new people	"The people close to me want me to donate blood"
Values motivation	The possibility of finding a context in which one can express personal values and those connected to one's commitment	"By donating blood, I could do something for a cause that I feel is important"
Self-enhancement motivation	This has to do with a motivational process that is focused on growth and development of oneself, thus allowing for the promotion of self-esteem and self-acceptance	"Donating blood would increase my self-esteem"
Ego-protection motivation	This allows, on the one hand, for the reduction of guilty feelings due to one's sense of being more fortunate than others and, on the other hand, for the resolution of personal problems by shifting attention to the people who benefit from one's service	"Donating blood would help me overcome my personal problems"
Knowledge motivation	This concerns the opportunity to learn new things or to experiment with knowledge and abilities that one does not usually use	"By donating blood I could learn a lot about the reason why I am lending a helping hand"

Adopting a functionalist approach, the authors claim that volunteerism serves different functions for any one person, who may have different motivations from those held by other people. The motivations underlying voluntary actions may, in turn, be different depending on the function volunteerism has for those who undertake this commitment. In particular, the authors identify six motivations related to: the social sphere, values, self-enhancement, ego-protection, knowledge, and career [18] (see Table 1). This approach assumes that people are moved by a complex combination of motivational orientations that complete one another, considering in a conjoint manner the different motivations that could lead to the action without reducing them to mere presence/absence [19,20]. People do not carry out volunteer activities spurred by only one motivation, but by many. To understand what drives people to engage in volunteer activities, it is thus necessary to consider the combination of these motivations conjointly.

Recent studies that have applied this model to blood donation [21] reveal, moreover, that these motivations are not constant but change over time (from mostly egoistical motivations to motivations that are mostly altruistic and related to civic engagement): in summary, blood donation can be understood as a *process*, and the motivational dimensions that sustain it change during the donor's career [22–24].

Among the variables studied in the literature, those that are most important for understanding the gesture of donation are (a) gender and (b) number of donations. In a recent literature review [25], it emerges that gender, in particular, plays a fundamental role in the motivation to donate: women seem to be driven by more altruistic motivations while men are spurred by individualistic motivations.

Another important variable for donor retention is number of donations because over time a "donor" role identity emerges [26,27], which is one of the strongest predictors of intention to continue to donate [18,28].

Even if recent studies [20] underscore that motivations change over time, it has not yet been shown how they change conjointly with respect to gender and number of donations. The present contribution, therefore, proposes to add to the knowledge about this phenomenon with particular reference to the Italian context. This is a very important topic because knowing what the motivations are that spur people to donate blood can help organizations involved in promoting donor recruitment and retention to better understand

which aspects they should focus on in order to reach their objectives. In particular, in light of the falling numbers of donors after their first donation, a finding reported in the national and international literature [29–31], our results demonstrate that retention building strategies must be implemented from the very first donation.

In light of the literature presented here, this contribution proposes to investigate the motivations underlying blood donation on the basis of (a) donor gender and (b) number of donations, using the functionalist approach as its theoretical framework.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Participants

Participants were 237 Italian donors who were representative of all the Italian regions (64.6% male and 35.4% female; range 18–73 years, $M = 35.92$, $SD = 14.33$) with number of donations ranging from 1 to 115 ($M = 16.60$, $SD = 19.49$). 15.6% of participants have a middle school diploma, 51.6% have a high school diploma, and 32.8% have a university degree. Students represent 15.3% of participants while 61.6% are workers, 11.1% are retired, and 12% are homemakers.

2.2. Procedure

The participants were recruited in the waiting rooms of the blood transfusion services of many AVIS offices by volunteers of the same association.

All the participants who were given questionnaires were informed in advance that their participation would be unpaid and voluntary and that all data collected would be used for the sole purpose of research and in an aggregate manner.

2.3. Measures

The participants filled out a self-report questionnaire containing:

- The Motivations to Volunteer Scale [14,15], in an *ad hoc* adaptation for blood donation: it is a questionnaire composed of 25 multiple choice items (from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*) in which each motivation was measured

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