

A qualitative study of blood donation perceptions and beliefs among rural Bangladeshi adults



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Abstract In this study, an attempt was made to investigate the blood donation behavior of rural people in Bangladesh. The main objective of this research is to explore the beliefs and perceptions of rural people regarding blood donation. For this purpose, the study was conducted in Nuruddinpur village at Sujanogor Upazilla in the Pabna district, which is situated in the west central Bangladesh. A combination of in-depth interviews, key informant interviews (KIIs) and storytelling was used in the study. Moreover, few focused group discussions (FGDs) and yard meetings were also used as data collection methods in this study. The results show that there are cultural components involved in providing and receiving blood. Blood and blood donation have different and versatile meanings that change according to the individual's role in donation. People relate blood to several cultural elements and issues while talking about blood donation, which shows that the choice and context of blood donation are influenced by personal beliefs, social and religious ties and experiences, and, of course, gender. In addition, some blood-related stigmas were also revealed in the study area. This study recommends that these sociocultural beliefs and lay perceptions should be considered and that pathways be taken to improve blood donation activities.

Keywords: blood, blood donation, cultural construction, beliefs, stigma

1. Introduction

Blood is universally recognized as the most valuable element that sustains life. It saves many lives worldwide in a variety of circumstances. It is the living fluid that all life is based on. However, the cultural meaning of blood donation is not static but rather dynamic. Depending on one's belief and culture, one might associate blood with family connections, Christ on the cross, halal meat, war sacrifice or any number of other things. According to World Health Organization (WHO) data from 173 countries, 112.5 million donations are made annually (Bostanci Dastan et al., 2013). In addition, concern about the demand for and supply of blood is increasing both in developed and developing countries (Samreen et al., 2021).

However, blood donation is a remarkably safe medical procedure. However, it is affected by attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge level (Alreshidi & Sula, 2022). It is a complex phenomenon influenced by a multitude of social and cultural factors. These factors determine why some individuals choose to donate blood while others do not and have a profound impact on the availability and stability of the blood supply. Blood supply is also limited by misconceptions about blood donation (Duh & Dabula, 2021). Social structures such as community power dynamics, gender roles, and religious beliefs can also influence an individual's decision to donate blood in many cultures; donating blood is seen as a charitable and selfless act and is motivated by a sense of responsibility to help others in need. Guarnaccia et al. suggested that blood donation is not simply an "individual fact" but rather a real "social action" characterized by systems of interpretation of reality based on individual-society relations. In addition to these individual variables, there are "relational" factors (i.e., factors related to contact with other people, family, and friends but also medical staff and volunteers) and "social" factors (attitudes and representations) that may influence a potential donor's decision (Guarnaccia et al., 2016). Blood donation, therefore, means different things to different people, and this is what anthropologists are interested in. Moreover, studies suggest that an anthropological approach would be particularly favorable in rural areas, and in rural areas, blood donation is poorly documented (Rakotoarivelo et al., 2022).

Most countries, especially developing countries, are facing an acute shortage of voluntary blood donors. This number is even lower in rural communities. Different studies suggest that in developing countries, blood donation activities are less common in rural areas than in urban areas. A study conducted in Ethiopia reported that respondents who were from urban areas practiced blood donation 2.5 times more than did those who were from rural areas (Yosef et al., 2020).

Research focused on attitudes, opinions, and motivations toward blood donation can provide an overall picture of the state of blood supply to healthcare centers not only in India but also across the world (Samreen et al., 2021). Although some research on blood donation is available, the nature of this research is limited to quantitative and cross-sectional studies. There are very few qualitative studies describing participants' points of view about blood donation. In this context, this study aimed to explore the meaning of blood and blood donation, as well as the social and cultural factors that influence blood donation



practices and behavior among rural and urban inhabitants in northern Bangladesh. Overall, this study contributes to a better understanding of the rural and urban context of blood donation in Bangladesh. People's perceptions, i.e., what is the meaning of blood and blood donation to them, practices and motivational factors behind people's participation in this practice and the sociocultural basis behind less participation in blood donation. This study will contribute to the understanding of the cultural and social basis of blood donation in Bangladesh, providing valuable insights into the cultural and social dynamics that shape blood donation practices and behavior. This information will be useful in developing effective strategies for promoting blood donation, improving health outcomes, and saving lives. This study will also contribute to the broader field of anthropology, as it offers new insights into the cultural and social dimensions of blood donation.

2. Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted in Nuruddinpur village at Sujanogor upazilla in the Pabna district, which is situated in west central Bangladesh. This study employs the anthropological technique of in-depth interviews, expanded by focused group discussion (FGD) of 6-9 participants grouped by sex, in which similar topics are covered and areas of controversy and dissent within the group are specifically explored (Kitzinger, 1994). We present findings from in-depth interviews conducted in 2022 that combined blood donor and receiver narratives and focused group discussion (FGD) with mass people who had not received or donated blood to determine villagers' perceptions of blood donation. The purpose of in-depth interviewing is to explore the experience of others and the meaning they make of that experience. Interviews are especially beneficial when motivated to provide "thick descriptions", when the main objective is to achieve a deep understanding of participants' thought paths and decisions (Granot et al., 2012). For in-depth interviews, 30 males and 20 females were selected, while four focused group discussions were conducted with a total of 26 villagers. All the participants in the interviews and FGDs were more than 20 years old and had at least one experience participating in blood donation activities. A minimum of six respondents were involved in a focused group discussion (FGD). A narrative and storytelling approach was applied while conducting in-depth interviews. For both IDIs, rather than relying on structured questionnaires, different checklists were used across the interview tools and respondents. We used a purposive sampling method; that is, we intentionally sought to interview subjects with certain characteristics to ensure a range of variables and experiences. Moreover, it is used to identify research participants and the research area to weigh the demand for the natural development of relationships. The recorded interviews and reflexive field notes were transcribed and analyzed manually following the thematic analytical framework. Theme was generated through a sequential process: turning from code to code family and finally to emerging themes. For validity issues, we used triangulation, an important technique for demonstrating the validity of qualitative findings through comparing data obtained from other studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Considering ethical issues, we explained the purpose of the study to the respondents and obtained oral consent from them. We did not include individuals who refused to participate in this study. In addition, we used pseudonyms of the participants in this study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Perceptions about blood in rural people

Blood is considered by most of the respondents to be the real medical need for saving lives in emergency situations. Many adults in the research area have said that they donated blood because it saved life. When there is no other way to help someone during medical need, then blood provides help. One respondent said, *"I could not help the patient with money, but I could help with something more precious that helped to sustain life, blood"* (name, age).

Blood is also considered a valuable but free lifesaving component. Some respondents noted that blood is actually more valuable because it sustains and saves one's life, yet it is given without cost. The paradox is that water, which is considered essential for life, must be purchased, while blood, which is also crucial for life, is freely available in the body. Ruhul, a 26-year-old adult respondent, added that *"Blood is free, you need to buy water even which is said to be the other name of life. However, you know what can be said to be the other name of life? Blood. You are getting it for free, and it actually saves and sustains your life"* (Ruhul, 26).

A large share of respondents believe that during a medical emergency, the vast importance of blood can be felt. They interpreted blood as a call to action, urging people to consider donating blood to help meet the ongoing need for blood in the medical community. One respondent stated, *"Giving blood works well. When one needs blood, blood is not found in many cases. In this case, if there is no problem in the blood, the blood can be taken by checking through the medical examination"*. Another respondent said,

"I fell in a terrible accident two years ago. My blood group is also rare. In addition, I was not getting blood, so I know how much important blood is. It literally gets me back from death. I do not know if I would be alive sitting here talking with you if it were not for the blood that I received when I needed it" (Shahid 25).

Few respondents addressed the importance of blood and said, *"The main thing is to live with blood from the person from whom the blood is available in times of danger"* and highlighted the importance of having a ready supply of blood in times

of danger. Blood is a vital component of the human body, and having access to it in times of need can literally mean the difference between life and death.

Therefore, the study revealed that participants see blood as a bodily substance that helps them sustain life and is crucial for emergency medical needs; in particular, blood is special because it is considered a free lifesaving component.

3.2. Perceptions and beliefs about blood donation activities

It is evident from different studies that perceptions regarding blood donations are culturally constructed, as the participants associated knowledge acquired in the social world with moral issues and their life experiences (Conceição et al., 2016). The present study also shows that respondents have different perceptions about blood donation. Most of them consider it a religious and virtuous act. They also feel that in addition to helping others by donating blood, doing so is also beneficial for their own health. Overall, a new social bond is created through blood donation activities, and it helps to maintain and strengthen social bonds. Descriptions of the perceptions are given below.

3.2.1. A health benefiting activities

Although the most crucial aspect of blood donation is that it can save lives, donating blood has several significant positive effects on the health of donors. From the study area, we see that respondents associate blood donation as a health benefiting activity that helps them to keep them fit and healthy from giving blood. According to a donor interviewed,

"Giving blood is good because your cholesterol level stays good, and your body works better too. If I give blood, I will remain fit, my body will not face any problems, and donating blood will also help in generating fresh blood". (Raj, 28)

This view is also shared by Sharif, a 35-year-old former company worker who is now unemployed, who stated, *"Giving blood generates fresh blood and it makes me feel much better about my own health. I usually feel weak initially after giving blood, but after that wears off, I feel like I am back in my youth, I feel very energetic".*

That is, giving blood makes their bodies or health better, which is also a good reason to give blood. The fact that giving blood is good for the body and does not cause any problems has given them a positive aspect to give blood.

3.2.2. A way to make and strengthen social ties

Blood donation is not only a process of giving blood to someone in need but also a way to make and strengthen social ties. When people donate blood to friends, family members, or people with whom they have connections, the existing relationship strengthens. One participant said, *"Most of the people who need blood in the village donate blood from their circle of friends or relatives" (Belal,22).*

Blood donation can also occur through connections made through social media. One participant added, *"I have previously given blood to someone from Dhaka. I do not know him. He knocked me after seeing my Facebook status" (Sharif, 39).*

Blood donors often feel a sense of responsibility to the community. The following statement will clarify this:

"We do not have any organization for blood donation or management. However, we have a circle of our own. If I cannot give blood myself, then I manage from there. My education was in Nadirganj. From there, I went to Pangsha. Then, from there, I went to Pabna. We are all friends from these three places. Junior seniors have contact with everyone. This network has been created from there" (Nasim, 29).

Blood donation strengthens the bond between people who have a preexisting relationship. Blood donation can lead to the formation of new relationships. One respondent said, *"When blood was needed, we contacted the uncle who lived next to us; he contacted his college, and then college students gave blood" (Tutul, 26).*

Blood donation helps to make and strengthen social ties. In addition to making new relationships and strengthening existing ones, blood donation can also serve as a way to maintain social ties.

3.2.3. A religious and virtuous act

Many studies suggest that people display positive beliefs, opinions, and motivation toward blood donation. To assess beliefs, behaviors and opinions about blood donation, Samreen et al. conducted a cross-sectional community-based study in telangana, India, and found that most of them considered blood donation an important act and a national duty of every individual and were willing to donate in the future (Samreen et al., 2021). However, in this study, we found that the study population did not consider blood donation to be a national duty; rather, they viewed blood donation as a religious and virtuous act. This is evident in the responses of the participants, who emphasized the importance of helping others and saving lives as a religious duty in Islam. One participant stated, *"As a Muslim, we are required to help a Muslim. All Muslims are brothers. As a Muslim, it is your duty to help someone else. By providing blood, the body of the donor is slightly injured, but both the donor and the person who obtains the blood benefit. This is divine" (Ramzan, 38).*

This statement highlights the religious aspect of blood donation in Islam. Furthermore, the idea of blood donation as a humanitarian act was also expressed by the participants. As one participant noted, “Non-Muslims who give blood have knowledge and humanity. It is our duty to save life, no matter who it is” (Nizam, 24).

Another participant said,

“The young boy who donated blood to my husband's father told me, ‘I come from a family of low-income earners. Blood is required to prevent the loss of human life. As I am helping to save the life of another person by donating blood, God will love me. Because of this, I save other people's lives.’” (Rahima Banu)

Another respondent, named Jakir, said, “We commit many sins in our daily life. It has worked for me that I am helping others by donating blood. By doing these, it helps to absolve at least a little sin.” (Jakir)

In the study area, many people think that their sins will be expunged through the reward of donating blood. Because he is helping to save someone else's life when he gives blood. Many people believe that this automatically makes him a person of God choosing. The study population demonstrated that blood donation is seen as a way of fulfilling religious obligations, exhibiting humanity, doing good for others, and supporting those in need. Although there are many different societal factors that can be cited as a justification for donating blood, the religious aspect is also a powerful point of donation for them. These findings are also supported by different scholars. According to many surveys, the most important motivating factor for blood donation was altruism, which was “the desire to help others in need and save lives”. This can be related to religion, as these countries are Muslim majority countries, and according to many Muslim scholars, donating blood is a duty for every Muslim. For example, the late Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Baz urged Muslims to donate blood in local hospitals to save the lives of needy patients. This trend is consistently overcoming paid donations and increasing the donation rate in these countries (Alreshidi & Sula, 2022).

4. Conclusion

In short, it is clear from the study that blood donation practices in rural areas are shaped by the interplay of social and cultural factors. These practices reflect the values, beliefs, and attitudes of rural communities toward blood donation and transfusions. In this study area, there are cultural and religious taboos surrounding blood donations, which can impact people's willingness to donate blood. There is also limited awareness about the importance of blood donation and misconceptions about the process, which can make it difficult to increase blood donation rates in rural communities. Therefore, to change different norms around health and wellness, exposure to media campaigns and public education programs can play a role in shaping the motivations behind blood donation. This study also suggested that a deeper understanding of the sociocultural factors that drive individuals to donate blood is essential for developing effective strategies to increase blood donation rates and ensure a stable blood supply for medical treatments and emergencies. Therefore, the findings provide insights into the beliefs, attitudes and opinions of elderly people about blood donation and suggest that different educational programs and advocacy should be undertaken at both the local and national levels.

Ethical considerations

We take oral consent from the respondents and in case of deny we take interview from another. In addition, we used pseudonyms of the participants in this study.

Conflict of Interest

All authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in the article.

Funding

No funds, grants, or other support were received. This research was conducted through self-funding.

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