

E-ISSN: 2616-4493 P-ISSN: 2616-4485 www.homoeopathicjournal.com IJHS 2023; 7(3): 297-303 Received: 08-06-2023 Accepted: 12-07-2023

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International Journal of <u>Homoeopathic Sciences</u>

Barriers for voluntary blood donation among the students of Government Homoeopathic Medical College, Calicut: A qualitative study

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.33545/26164485.2023.v7.i3e.926

Abstract

Donating blood is an act that can save millions of life. This study aims to explore the barriers for voluntary blood donation among the medical students of Govt. Homoeopathic Medical College. Two focus group discussions (FGD) and six In-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted among the medical students. The discussions were carried out in the local language, and the verbatim was translated into English. Most of the participants were aware of the importance of donating blood to save other people and are interested in donating blood. Being anaemic and underweight were the most factors that hinders them from becoming a blood donor. The participants recommended the need for creating more awareness among the students.

Keywords: Barriers to blood donation, medical students, Homoeopathic Medical College

Introduction

Blood transfusion is life saving but many patients requiring transfusion do not have access to safe blood. Providing safe and adequate blood should be a crucial part of every country's national health care policy and infrastructure. According to WHO, blood donation by 1% of the population is generally taken as the minimum need to meet a nation's basic requirements for blood ^[1]. In India, there is wide gap between requirement and availability of blood. As per the above WHO norms, India's demand for blood is around 13.1 million blood units (1% of 1.3 billion population).

Blood donors can be categorized as voluntary blood donors, replacement donors and professional blood donors ^[2]. These categories are based on the behavioral patterns of donors. According to WHO, about 118.4 million blood donations is collected worldwide ^[3].

The foundation of a safe and adequate supply of blood and blood products is voluntary blood donation. Blood donors from low-risk communities who give their blood voluntarily and without compensation are the safest. Despite this notion, family/replacement donors still provide more than 45% of the blood collected in India^[2]. These donors are estimated to be much more likely to have transfusion-transmissible illnesses such as HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, syphilis, and malaria. Since it is now known that only voluntary non-remunerated frequent giving is the safest, it is advisable to transition to 100% voluntary donations in our country, where full laboratory examinations are neither practical nor viable. Consequently, there is a need for inspiration to encourage regular, voluntary blood donations.

Health sector personnel are a source of information and inspiration for many health-related issues, such as blood donation. Community members also rely on them. Young people have also been at the forefront of several National programs and actions aimed at securing safe blood supply through voluntary blood donations.

Qualitative research is a process of enquiry with the goal of understanding a given problem from multiple perspectives, building a complex and holistic picture of the phenomenon of interest. Qualitative research follows an emic perspective in that it seeks to understand human behaviour from the subject's own frame of reference, and is committed to viewing events, values etc. from the perspective of those being studied. It produce findings that are not arrived at by any means of statistical procedures. Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in that there is a reluctance to impose a priori theoretical frameworks at the outset in qualitative research. Inductive reasoning utilized for identification of pattern and relationship which is very much essential for creating a theory ^[4].

Qualitative studies let participants to express their views without any constrains. There are different quantitative studies documenting perceptions of medical students on voluntary blood donation. Qualitative studies on this aspect are very few. Studies in this sector are not recorded in Homoeopathic Medical Colleges so far. This necessitates a study in this area, among students of Homoeopathic Medical College to find out the reasons for not donating blood voluntarily and to familiarize the students with the methodology and analysis of qualitative research for academic purpose.

The present study was designed with the objective to explore the reasons for not donating blood voluntarily among students of Govt. Homoeopathic Medical College, Calicut by conducting Focus Group Discussions and In Depth Interviews.

Methods

The present study is a qualitative study which was conducted in order to investigate the opinions of the students studying at Government Homoeopathic Medical College, Calicut about blood donation with the help of a semi-structured interview schedule. The study was conducted at Government Homoeopathic Medical College, Karaparamba, Calicut from December 2022 to January 2023 among I year BHMS and II year BHMS undergraduate students.

An initial institutional cross-sectional study design with quantitative data collection methods was employed. Knowledge, practice and attitude towards voluntary blood donation was gathered using a questionnaire survey. Questionnaire with closed ended questions were used for data collection. Pretested structured self administered questionnaire prepared in English was used in gathering information. The questionnaire was designed to obtain information regarding knowledge, attitude and practice towards voluntary blood donation among undergraduate BHMS students. The opinions of experts and peers were taken with regard to the adequacy and the format of the items in the questionnaire. Pre-test of the questionnaire were done on 10 students to identify any ambiguity, inconsistencies and to assess the acceptability of questionnaire. Written informed consent was obtained from the students and confidentiality was maintained through out the study.

Questionnaire consisted of three sections- practice, knowledge and attitude. Knowledge part contains 12 questions. Knowledge on blood donation was assessed through questions covering benefits, requirements and restrictions of blood donation. The attitude for blood donation was assessed through 8 questions with yes and no options. Blood donation practice was assessed through 7 questions addressing the nature of donation, frequency of donation, reasons for not donating blood etc.

A scoring mechanism was used to understand overall knowledge level. A score of one has given for each correct response and zero for wrong response. Those who responded correctly to 50% of questions or higher were categorized as knowledgeable, while individuals whose responses fell below the 50% were classified as having inadequate knowledge. Out of all the questions meant to assess attitude, those who responded with 50% or more correct answers were classified as having a favourable attitude, while those who responded with less than the median was classified as having an unfavourable attitude.

Sample size was determined by using an assumption that the proportion of good knowledge was 50% among students with a confidence level of 95% and marginal error of 3% and by using a single population proportion formula. By considering 2% non-response rate, the final sample size was 110.

After data collection, each questionnaire was checked for completeness, edited, cleaned and data were analyzed by descriptive statistics. According to the above survey, only 68% of students had adequate knowledge level regarding blood donation and 86% students had positive attitude towards blood donation. II year BHMS students knew more about blood donation than 1 year BHMS students.

The second part of the study was to achieve the study objective on barriers to voluntary blood donation. Students who responded with less than 50% in the knowledge, attitude, practice survey were selected by purposive sampling for the qualitative study. Unlike quantitative studies, a fixed sample size selection is not possible in qualitative study. Hence only 23 students who were interested and willing to participate was selected and interviewed to ensure richness of information. Study participants included 20 female and 3 male students. An informed consent was obtained from every participant and strict confidentiality was maintained throughout the study.

For the data collection, 2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 8-9 participants each and 6 In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) were conducted among the selected participants. A semistructured interview schedule was utilized as data collection instrument in the study. Before data collection process, the participants were informed about the aims of the study and expected contributions to it. The In- depth interview and focus group discussion involved 4 main questions covering the study objective. Each interview lasted about 20 minutes. The questions were asked one by one by the researcher to get answers from the participants. The interviews were recorded with a voice-recorder. Then collected data were transcribed. The maintain confidentiality of the study, the names of the participants were not asked. The data are recorded in the form of voice recordings and text documents. Data was collected until saturation of answers from participants.

The data collected in the form of voice recordings from the Focus Group Discussions and In-Depth Interviews was first transcribed verbatim into the form of text documents and then translated to English language without any changes in the meaning. The data was then analyzed by thematic analysis and arrived at the conclusion.

Results

The findings obtained from the analyses of the focus group discussions and interviews are presented in the order of the questions.

Findings Obtained from the Analysis of Question 1: What Is Your Opinion About Blood Donation?

The findings obtained from the analysis of Question 1 which indicated views of participants on blood donation are shown in Table 1. **Table 1:** Opinion of participants on blood donation

Core theme	Sub-theme	Frequency	Percentage
Donor related matters	Good thing	23	100
	Honorable act	2	8.7
	Charity/ help others	7	30.4
	No harm	5	21.7
	Beneficial to donor	7	30.4
	Inner happiness/ satisfaction	5	21.7
	Improve blood/ produce new RBCs	4	17.4
	Can do screening tests	2	8.7
Recipient related matters	Beneficial for recipients	4	17.4
	Give life/saves life	6	26.1
Others	Blood donation is harmful to donor- Misconceptions in society	2	8.7
	Everyone must do blood donation	6	26.1

According to Table 1, all participants unanimously agreed that blood donation is a good thing. Two of them (8.7%) called it as an honorable act. 7 (30.4%) participants consider blood donation as a way to help other people or as a selfless act of charity. There was understanding (6, 26.1%) that blood donation is giving life or it could save life of other people. 5 (21.7%) of the participants pointed out that blood donation does not cause any harm to donors and 7 (30.4%) of the participants mentioned it as beneficial to donor. Blood donation is considered as a way to get inner happiness or satisfaction of helping people by 5 (21.7%) participants.

FGD1 Participant 9: "It is a good thing. It saves another person's life, thus we get inner happiness".

Another aspect of personal benefit expressed by 4 (17.4%) participants was blood donation could improve donor's blood or produce new RBCs.

FGD 2 Participant 4: "We have no loss on donating blood. Blood donation helps to produce more blood. It is a good thing we can do for society. It is an act everyone has to do". 2 (8.7%) among the participants find it useful as we can do free screening tests on donating blood.

FGD 1 Participant 4: "It is good thing. It is good for donor. It helps to produce new RBCs, and on blood testing

at the time of donation we can find out if we have any disease condition. It is good in every perspective".

Another 2 (8.7%) participants mentioned that there are several misconceptions in society that blood donation is harmful to donor.

FGD 1 Participants 7: "Through blood donation we are giving life itself to a person. Nowadays on visiting hospitals we can see that there is high demand for blood as there are so many accidents occurring. So it is a good thing if we donate blood in blood banks. There is no harm in that. Earlier there was fear of transmission of diseases and of loss of blood, now these are changing gradually."

4 (17.4%) participants said blood donation is also beneficial for recipients. 6 (26.1%) among the participants pointed that everyone must do blood donation.

Findings Obtained from the Analysis of Question 2 and 3: Have You Ever Donated Blood Before? (If Your Answer Is Yes, How Many Times?) If it is no, please explain the reason for not donating.

The findings obtained from the analysis of Question 2 related to the status of donation of blood before is shown on Table 2. In addition, the responses expressed in addition to yes or no are categorized as sub-themes as shown in the Table 2.

Theme		Sub-themes	Frequency	Percentage
No, I have not			21	91.3
		I'm very interested, but I can't donate	6	26.1
		I went to donate, but I couldn't donate	3	13.04
	I'm	willing to donate once I become fit for donation	6	26.1
Yes, I have			2	8.7
	Once	Before this, I didn't have much awareness	1	4.4
		Before this, I didn't get any opportunities	1	4.4

Table 2: Blood donation status

According to Table 2, 21 (91.3%) out of 23 had never donated blood before. And only 2 (8.7%) remaining have donated once. 6 (26.1%) participants showed much interest in blood donation, but said that they cannot donate due to different reasons. 3 (13.04%) participants reported that they had gone to donation camps but were unable to donate due to certain reasons. 6 of them added that they are willing to donate blood once they are fit for to do so.

FGD 2 Participant 8: "I am underweight for blood donation and not fit for donation. I will to do donation once

I'm fit for it. I have no issues in doing it. But I'm very happy to do it".

One of participants who had donated once said that she didn't have much awareness about the donation procedures before a camp was conducted at the college. The other one who once donated said that she didn't get to participate in any camps before.

FGD 2 Participant 7: "I have donated once when a camp was conducted at the college. Before that I didn't get any opportunities to do it"

Table 3 shows the findings related to the reasons of the students who had not donated blood before. Their reasons are organized in the form of themes and sub-themes.

Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency	Percentage
Health	Low hemoglobin level/ Anemic	9	39.1
	Underweight	8	34.8
	Low blood pressure	2	8.7
	Periods	1	4.4
	Age	1	4.4
	Other health issues	1	4.4
Fears	Of needles	2	8.7
	Of blood	2	8.7
Rare blood group, so authority told to donate only to those in need		1	4.4
Others	Didn't see camps	3	13.04
	No one approached	1	4.4
	No requirement in family	1	4.4
	No awareness	2	8.7

Table 3: Reasons for being not donated blood before

As demonstrated in Table 3, the reasons for being not donated blood before are categorized into 4 themes which are further represented in different subthemes. Under the theme Health, the reasons pointed by participants are having low hemoglobin level in blood or being anemic (9, 39.1%), underweight (8, 34.8%), low blood pressure (2, 8.7%), being in menstruating period when occasion comes (1, 4.4%), completing 18 years last year only (1, 4.4%), and not being in a condition to donate once the chance came (1, 4.4%).

FGD 2 Participant 1: "I was not able to donate. Once I went to a camp but was unable to donate as I was having low hemoglobin level. So many girls face this problem nowadays. The reason is improper diet, not having nutritious diet. All are having junk food. It might be the cause for my condition also".

Some other participants showed fear of needles (2, 8.7%)

and fear of blood (2, 8.7%).

FGD 1 Participant 9: "I have fear of blood and when I see blood I get dizzy"

Another participant said that as she has rare blood group, blood donation authority told to donate only to those in need and not to donate in camps.

FGD 1 Participant 2: "I'm very interested to donate. But I have O negative blood group. When I went to donate in a blood donation camp, they told me not to donate in camps as it is a rare group and donate only for those in need. When such situations came, I was not able to donate as I was having low blood pressure and was underweight. When I was healthy and having the required body weight, no one approached me".

Other reasons for being not donated blood before are not seeing any camps (3, 13.04%), nobody asked for donation (1, 4.4%), no requirement in family till then (1, 4.4%), and not having awareness about it (2, 8.7%).

FGD Participant 7: "I couldn't donate as I am underweight and having low hemoglobin. I'm very interested in donating. In this society, people are not getting awareness about importance of blood donation, and they don't know how to donate, so people are not willing to donate".

IDI 6: "Till now, there was no requirement of blood in my family. So I was not bothered about it. Also I have little knowledge about blood donation. I have no problem in donating if I am explained about its benefits".

Findings Obtained from the Analysis of Question 4: What Are Your Suggestions to Motivate People to Voluntary Blood Donation?

The findings obtained from the analysis of Question 3 which indicated suggestions of participants to motivate people to voluntary blood donation are shown in Table 4.

Theme		Frequency	Percentage
Give awareness			
Subthemes	To students at school and college	5	21.7
	To parents	1	4.4
	To old people	1	4.4
	To society	1	4.4
Conduct campaigns		6	26.1
Conduct more camps		4	17.4
Promotion by youth		1	4.4
Give appreciation to donors		1	4.4

Table 4: Suggestions to motivate people to voluntary blood donation

In Table 4, it is shown that 5 of the participants suggested giving awareness classes in school and college in order to motivate them to blood donation and make them aware about the importance of it.

FHD 1 Participant 8: "My suggestion is to give awareness classes in school, so that students on turning 18 are ready to donate blood".

Some of them also pointed that parents (1, 4.4%), old people (1, 4.4%) and entire society (1, 4.4%) must be provided with motivation classes to remove their misconceptions and myths about blood donation and encourage them to donate.

FGD 1 Participant 5: "Also, give awareness to parents as they are having so many misconceptions about blood donation. They fear that it can cause disease transmission as the field is not that much developed".

FGD 1 Participant 2: "Conduct campaigns in remote areas, because they are the ones who are more afraid of blood donation. Particularly adult people are having many wrong views about blood donation. So we must educate them. They think females are not healthy enough to give blood as they have menstruation".

6 (26.1%) of the participants suggested conducting campaigns as a way to promote blood donation and 4

(17.4%) of the participants expressed the need to organize more camps at different locations to increase the rate of blood donation.

FGD 2 Participant 3: "We can conduct more campaigns. Personally I have not seen any camps. But I have only heard about it. My first Experience was when they conducted a camp at our College. I had no idea about the basic requirements and procedures of blood donation. A campaign can give idea about blood donation".

IDI 6: "There are so many people unaware about the importance of blood donation. So if someone conduct campaign on its importance, it might be helpful to many". One of the participants (1, 4.4%) mentioned that youth can do great work in promotion of blood donation.

FGD 2 Participant 1: "We, the young people are the ones to promote blood donation. We are medical students and ones who are more healthy people as in older age group there is many disease conditions. So the best time to donate is this period. Hence we have to utilize this time at maximum and give blood and also promote the act".

Another participant (1, 4.4%) expressed that giving appreciation and certificate to the persons who donate blood can make them donate again and also others to get inspired.

IDI 3: "We can conduct social media campaigns to encourage people to donate blood. Also give certificates ad appreciation to those donated to make them donate again".

Discussionn

In this study, two focus group discussions and six in depth interviews were conducted and analyzed. On assessing the opinion of participants on blood donation, all the participants agreed that blood donation is a good thing. It was seen that a considerable group of participants considered blood donation as an act of charity or as a way of helping other people. There was the belief that, in carrying out this charity work, the donor would feel good about themselves. Getting inner happiness, improving health through blood donation and getting screening tests done are the donor's benefits pointed out by them. There was an understanding that blood donation could save the life of the recipient. Some of them expressed that there are several misconceptions in society like blood donation is harmful to donor. A group of participants added that everyone must try to do blood donation. This study is in agreement with a similar study named "A qualitative study of perceptions about voluntary blood donation among the supportive service employees of a multispecialty rural tertiary care hospital" conducted in Gujarat, India was done by pile sorting exercise [5]. They concluded that majority of the respondents mostly considered blood donation as a noble and lifesaving act.

On assessing the status of blood donation among the participants more than 90% of them had never donated blood before. Others donated only once when camp was conducted at the college. Many of the participants expressed their great interest to donate blood but they are unable to do so because of some health related matters. The various factors that acted as obstacle preventing participants from donating blood voluntarily are anemia, underweight, low blood pressure, being on menstrual cycle, other health issues, fears, lack of awareness and lack of opportunities. The commonest barrier is being anemic and underweight. Fear of needles and fear of blood were expressed by some. Some participants felt they would be discouraged to donate by their family members who were concerned about the impact that the loss of blood would have on their health. In the study titled "An exploration on blood donation intention among population in Hawassa city, Southern Ethiopia; theory of planned behavior approach: A qualitative study" organized by Dereje Geleta and Berhan Meshesha reported that majority of the participants stated that they had fear that they will suffer from some health problem if they donate blood. Being anemic and weak was reported by the majority ^[6]. Lack of knowledge about the pre-request to donate blood also contributes a lot for not to donate a blood.

On demanding their suggestions to promote blood donation, only some of them responded. The commonest suggestion was to conduct more campaigns to encourage people towards blood donation and also to give awareness sessions to students to let them know its importance. There was also a prominent suggestion to conduct more camps as there is lack of opportunities for those who are interested to donate blood. Other suggestions were to give awareness to parents, old people and society. Blood donation by youth should be promoted and that certificates of appreciation should be given to the blood donors as an encouragement.

As the main objective of the study is to explore the reasons for not donating blood voluntarily among students, it is found out that the commonest reasons are the students are being anemic and underweight. There was a very positive attitude towards blood donation among them. On assessing their answers, it was seen that they were unaware of the nearby blood donation centers/ blood banks and were under the notion that blood should be donated only through blood donation camps.

Being a qualitative study, data usually are collected from a few individuals who are willing to give information. The main limitation of this study is that the findings cannot be generalized to a larger population. Another major issue in this type of studies are bias. Biases are inherent in qualitative studies and more so when teaching faculties become investigators and the students become the participants.

Conclusion

The students in Govt. Homoeopathic Medical College, Calicut do have a positive attitude towards blood donation but there are unable to donate due to health related reasons like anemia and underweight. There is necessity to create more awareness among the students about voluntary blood donation and which has to be done on regular basis. The promotion of voluntary blood donation among medical be encouraged students should through intensive information, education, and communication (IEC) efforts and regular motivational seminars. All professional colleges as well as Arts and Science colleges coming under various Universities should establish Red Ribbon Clubs in collaboration with the National AIDS Control Society because colleges accommodate the largest population of eligible healthy blood donors. Further, every individuals and families living around the college or hospital should be motivated to participate in the activities of the Red Ribbon Club. It is also highly desirable to conduct regular blood donation drives. This type of coordinated efforts will ensure that all the patients in need will have access to safe blood.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to all the students and staff who contributed to this study. We thank the statistician for his help in the statistical analysis.

Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

Financial Support and Sponsorship

The study is not funded by any external agency.

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How to Cite This Article

Sreejitha PS, Nasarin NA, Krishna G. Barriers for voluntary blood donation among the students of Government Homoeopathic Medical College, Calicut: A qualitative study. International Journal of Homoeopathic Sciences. 2023;7(3):297-303.

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Appendices

Knowledge, attitude & practice towards voluntary blood donation questionnaire

Knowledge regarding blood donation

- 1) Do you know your blood type?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
- 2) Minimum age for blood donation
 - a) 18 years
 - b) 20 years
 - c) 25 years
 - d) 30 years

- e) I don't know
- 3) Minimum weight for blood donation
 - a) 40 kg
 - b) 50 kg
 - c) 60 kg
 - d) >45 kg
 - e) I don't know
- 4) Minimum Haemoglobin level for blood donation
 - a) 10 g/dl
 - b) 14 g/dl
 - c) 12.5 g/dl
 - d) I don't know
- 5) Amount of blood a person can donate in a single time?
 - a) 450 ml
 - b) 300 ml
 - c) 600 ml
 - d) 200 ml
 - e) I don't know
- 6) Required blood pressure at the time of blood donation
 - a) Systolic: 100-180 mmHg, Diastolic: 50-100 mmHg
 - b) Systolic: 100-210 mmHg, Diastolic: 50-150 mmHg
 - c) Systolic: 70-130 mmHg, Diastolic: 50-90 mmHg
 - d) I don't know
- 7) Universal donor and recipient
 - a) O positive & AB negative
 - b) O negative & AB positive
 - c) A positive & B negative
 - d) B positive & AB negative
 - e) I don't know
- 8) How often can a person donate blood?
 - a) Males- once in every 6 months, females- once in every 8 months
 - b) Males- once in every 3 months, females- once in every 4 months
 - c) Both males and females once in a year
 - d) I don't know
- 9) Most required blood group
 - a) A positive
 - b) B positive
 - c) O positive
 - d) O negative
 - e) I don't know
- 10) What diseases are transmissible by blood transfusion?
 - a) HBV
 - b) HCV
 - c) Tuberculosis
 - d) Syphilis
 - e) Malaria
 - f) HIV
 - g) All of the above
- 11) Can women who are menstruating donate blood?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) I don't know

- 12) Can a person who has diabetes or high BP donate blood?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) I don't know

Attitude towards blood donation

- 1) Do you think donating blood is a good habit?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
- 2) What is your attitude towards blood donation?
 - a) Positive
 - b) Negative
 - c) Neutral
- 3) Do you think there is need to give incentives to those who donate blood?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
- 4) Could harm occur to a blood donor after donation?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) I don't know
- 5) Do you think donating blood lower donor's immunity?a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) I don't know
- 6) Could donation leads to anaemia?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) I don't know
- 7) Are you willing to donate blood to anyone?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
- 8) Are you willing to donate blood to relative?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No

Practice of blood donation

- 1) Have you ever donated blood?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
- 2) If yes, how many times?
 - a) Once
 - b) Twice
 - c) Thrice
- 3) To whom have you donated blood?
 - a) Relative
 - b) Known person other than relative
 - c) Stranger
- 4) How do you feel after donating blood?
 - a) Positive
 - b) Negative
 - c) Indifferent

- 5) Will you encourage others to donate blood?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) I don't know
- 6) Reasons for donating blood
 - a) Altruism
 - b) Sense of social responsibility
 - c) Spiritual bliss
 - d) Helping friends or family
 - e) Others
- 7) Reasons for not donating blood
 - a) Medical reason
 - b) Fear of needles
 - c) Fear of sight of blood
 - d) Fear of weakness
 - e) Blood donation can lead to anaemia
 - f) Blood donation can reduce donor's immunity
 - g) Lack of time to donate
 - h) Lack of information
 - i) No one has ever asked
 - j) Objection from family members
 - k) Others

Focus group discussion and in-depth interview guide

The following steps were adopted in conducting the focus group discussion

- Formulate questions for FGD
- Selection of participants
- Schedule location, time
- Invite the participants
- Conduct FGD
- Data collection- voice recodings, text notes
- Analysis of data

Facilitating the session

- Opening the session by the facilitator using the written script
- Reading of the ground rules
- Setting of the agenda
- Reading of the questions
- Asking for clarifications when needed
- Making sure that everyone has the opportunity to participate on each question
- Closing the session by the facilitator using the written script.

Questions

- What's your opinion about blood donation?
- Have you ever donated blood before? If your answer is yes, How many times?
- If you have not donated blood, please explain your reasons for not donating blood.
- What are your suggestions to motivate people to voluntary blood donation?