

Myths and Perceptions Regarding Body Donation: A Cross-Sectional Questionnaire Based Study

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Abstract

Introduction: In India, the number of medical institutes in both the public and commercial sectors has suddenly increased over the past two decades, creating a special issue of the availability of the cadavers for anatomy teaching. Donating one's body is related with various social taboos and myths. According to our hypothesis, many of the educated and willing people, are not aware about body donation.

Materials and Methods: This was a cross-sectional prospective study, based on a set of questionnaire. The format was well approved by the institutional ethical council. A total of 480 questionnaire cards in all were issued, and 384 people actively participated. Responses were examined on a percentage basis using Microsoft Excel.

Results: Only 10% of the participants in our survey agreed with the idea of body donation, and only 19% had heard of it. Major contributing factors were unawareness about the concept of body donation, religious and social issues, doubts and lack of information regarding the honour and dignity maintained in the dissection rooms.

Conclusion: Our study focused on the issue of awareness about body donation in both general public as well as the medical professionals. Campaign regarding awareness of body donation and to educate students, medical professionals, and cadaver handlers about the respect and dignity of a donated body.

1. Introduction:

Worldwide, modern medicine promotes and uses cadaveric dissection as part of the anatomy curriculum. Over the past two decades, India has seen a dramatic increase in the number of medical institutes in both the public and private sectors.

This makes availability of the cadavers, a special challenge for anatomy teaching. Cadaveric dissection, is an inevitable part of the curriculum [1]. The ratio of cadavers to students is declining daily, and many first-year MBBS professionals say that there isn't enough hands-on dissection, which makes

it difficult to learn human anatomy. Body donation is associated with a lot of taboos and false beliefs in society [2].

This study was conducted to identify obstacles and potential fixes for the noble act of organ donation. We put up the hypothesis that many educated and willing individuals are uninformed about the availability of body donation, what happens to their body after donation, and how one can donate a body after passing away. This study focused on the importance of mass advertising and campaigning for body donation.

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2. Materials and Methods:

The institutional ethical council approved this cross-sectional prospective study, which was questionnaire-based. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before a pre validated semi-structured questionnaire was distributed [3] to degree colleges, clubs, and socially engaged organizations of our city. The questionnaire asked questions mostly about body donation awareness, willingness to donate one's body, and common misunderstandings and misconceptions about the practice.

A total of 480 questionnaires were given out, and 384 of them were returned by respondents. Individuals in the age range of 18 to 75 years were included in the study, and participation was optional. Microsoft Excel 2010 was used to analyze the data. Each question had a yes or no response option, and the proportion of each response was determined on a percentage scale.

3. Results:

480 surveys were sent, and 384 respondents returned the completed forms. The participants' average age was 30.4 years with females contributing 34% of participants and 66% of them were men. There were 47% Hindus, 11% of Muslims and 18% of Buddhists. Remaining participants were from the minor communities. Question 14 asked a series of open-ended questions regarding personal comments and queries about body donation.

Among the intriguing inquiries and questions was "Is it legal?" "Can a person with a disability donate their body?" "We heard that the body parts that are left over after the dissection are tossed elsewhere," "Can my family members visit my body after a donation? Once the body has been dissected and the purpose has been served, can my relatives perform the religious cremation or burial?" "Do the donated female bodies receive the proper care?" "I don't want a medical student to take a selfie with my dead body because "I think medical students are not treating bodies with respect." How many doctors donate their own bodies?"

4. Discussion:

The current cross-sectional study was carried with a hypothesis that society as a whole is unaware about body donation. Visual three-dimensional orientation is extremely important in the study of anatomy. Also, Future surgeons need it to master their skills, for which, cadaveric dissections and demonstrations are organized for orthopedic surgeons to acquire and practice new techniques. These cadavers are significant for everyone. Therefore, raising public awareness regarding body donation is urgently needed [4].

Our analysis confirmed the findings of other studies conducted around the world [5-7], according to which there is widespread unawareness and ignorance regarding the availability of body donation. "We discovered that just 19% of the study population knew body donation, and only 11% of the study population understood the importance of it". Merely 5% of the participants recognized that cadavers are used in medical education and research when it came to the significance of body donation in medicine and research. So, it becomes a necessity to organize a body donation awareness campaign [8] and educate the public about the availability and procedure of body donation.

The general public had a negative reaction towards body donation. 10% of the participants in the survey had a real belief in body donation. Numerous social, cultural, and religious beliefs could be to blame. According to this study, religious customs of cremation or burial and the idea of "life after death" may be to blame for people's lower propensity for corpse donation. Other investigations came to similar conclusions. In their respective research, Golchet et al. [6] and Bulware et al. [5,9] underlined the fact that a variety of factors, including age, gender, religious traditions, the concept of mortality, and humanitarian considerations, influence the decision to donate a body. Religious convictions have been shown to be a huge reason why body donations have dropped in our nation.

The majority of the participants in our study agreed that, for religious reasons, they don't want to donate their bodies and think that, in order to obtain "Moksha," "Haven," or "Jannat," and their last wishes should be carried out. This idea of life after

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death needs to be changed with the aid of spiritual authorities and large-scale awareness campaigns. Even though most religions agree that donations should be made, most spiritual scriptures are ambiguous regarding what they think about body donations.

Since it is considered taboo to donate one's body in our society, the members of the Body donation is discouraged in our culture, hence there were many questions on the minds of the participated in the current research. We, in answer to our open question, requested them to put up their queries, a few worthwhile queries came forward that are mentioned below.

Many of the participants had no idea that the body donation law even existed. "The Body Donation and Anatomy Act" make the practice of body donation lawful. According to numerous "Body Donation Acts" [10], the majority of them are similar in context with a few minor variations. The "Body Donation Act" of that state [11] governs the process of body donation in each state in India. "Typically, unclaimed bodies of unknown people, prisoners who died in custody, and willing donors with a valid will for body donation are given to medical facilities and research facilities based on demand and availability of cadavers".

What happens to the body after donating was the second relevant query. Every donor has a right to be made aware of the consequences of their contributions. Therefore, we believe that all potential donors should schedule a visit to the anatomy department. There should be a museum or wing in each anatomy department at every medical school to promote body donation. It is possible to arrange for picture charts and a guided tour of the dissecting room. This effort will raise public awareness of the benefits of organ donation and address any misconceptions that may prevail in that regard.

Medical students must learn about the differences between the anatomy of men and women. In general, female donors are less common than male donors, and there are fewer female cadavers available. In this regard, "do the female cadavers in the dissection room receive the respect they deserve?". Was a really difficult question to comment to. Again, there

needs to be an awareness campaign among medical students, professors, and anatomy department cadaver handlers.

Even after death, a female body should be treated with respect and decency. As it is connected to a wide range of feelings and familial pride. Participants' questions reflected the rising popularity of social media and the students' careless use of smartphones in the dissecting room.

"One participant responded that she was leaning toward body donation but that she had lately seen a photo of a medical student posing with Skeleton and holding a cadaver while dissecting its intimate areas". She claimed that after seeing these images on social media, she had changed her mind. She was correct in her assessment; therefore, this was concerning. Social media and mobile device misuse should be strictly discouraged. This is going to discourage people from donating their bodies.

Do doctors or anatomists themselves donate bodies? This query prompted reflection. Preaching is simple, but practicing it is challenging. So what if an anatomist or a doctor asked oneself the same question? Medical professionals were not analyzed separately from the general population in our study.

We intend to assess the attitudes of medical professionals and medical students toward body donation in a later study or a continuation of the current study, which may provide insight on the perspectives of medical professionals. Since the majority of them get donations, it is important to determine whether they are prepared to give themselves as donors. A study by Sheril US et al. [12] found that the majority of medical professionals and anatomists themselves are not eager to donate their bodies, hence it is possible to determine whether the saying "Charity begins at home" applies to medical professionals or not.

5. Conclusion:

It is important to recognize and respect the novel act of donating one's body for medical study and education. Our study population has a generally unfavorable attitude toward organ donation. "The general lack of awareness of the existence of body donation facilities and the idea that it is a novel act like organ donation that is governed by legal

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procedure are just a few of the many elements that contributed to this". We genuinely think that teaching hospitals and body donation beneficiaries should organize a widespread awareness campaign. While many people are willing to donate their bodies, they are concerned about certain ethical and humanitarian issues, such as how their remains will be handled in the dissection room and how their family members will be treated with dignity by budding doctors and body handlers. Monitoring and controlling the medical students' attitude toward the dead is necessary. Their careless actions could have negative repercussions in the future. Therefore, it is advised that medical students, instructors, and body handlers in the dissection hall should treat the donor's body parts with respect and retain their dignity. It is essential to note and appreciate the novel act of body donation for medical research and education. Body donation is not often viewed favourably.

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Table 1: Demographic distribution of the subjects participating in the survey.

		Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	253	66
	Female	131	34
Religion	Hindu	180	47
	Muslim	42	11
	Buddhists	69	18
	Other	92	24

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Table 2: Responses of the participants in percentage scale.

Sr. no	Question	Yes (%)	No (%)
1	I have heard about 'Body Donation'	73 (19%)	311(81%)
2	I am aware that "Body Donation is defined as the act of giving one's body after death for the medical research and education'	35 (9%)	349(91%)
3	I know the significance of 'Body donation'	42 (11%)	342(89%)
4	I know the donated body is used for the medical education	38 (10%)	346(90%)
5	I know that the donated body can be used for the research and other purposes	19 (5%)	365(95%)
6	I believe in the concept of ' Body Donation'	38 (10%)	346(90%)
7	I do not believe in 'Body Donation' due to my religious tradition and belief	319 (83%)	65(17%)
8	I believe that donated bodies are misused and mishandled.	161 (42%)	223(58%)
9	I will try to bring awareness about the noble act of 'Body Donation' among people.	46 (12%)	338(88%)
10	I can think about donating my body in future.	27 (7%)	357(93%)
11	I am willing to donate my body.	35 (9%)	349(91%)
12	Medical professionals should explain and educate the general public about the importance of this noble act of 'Body Donation'	196 (51%)	188(49%)
13	Anatomy teaching and medical research can be done without cadavers.	165(43%)	219(57%)