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Use of Public Library Services by Differently abled Persons: A Pilot Study of City Central Library, Dharwad

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Abstract

In this article, an attempt has been made to investigate whether differently abled persons effectively using public library services or not. For the study, 50 questionnaires were distributed to differently abled persons and finally 43 (86%) questionnaires were considered for analysis based on the merit of the filled questionnaires. The analysis of the data revealed that, differently abled persons use City Central Library services very rarely and majority rather all of them were physically disabled persons. Another finding is that, Information needs of differently abled persons are same as other abled persons. It is rather disappointing that majority i.e. 69.77% of information needs of differently abled persons remain un-satisfied. Inaccessibility, Lack of reading materials in alternative formats, special services and Lack of assistive technologies with access to computers are the major problems faced by the differently abled persons. The study concludes with some of the important suggestions for development of information resources, services and infrastructure facilities of the CCL in order to provide better services and to improve the collection to satisfy the needs of differently abled persons.

Keywords: Differently abled Persons, Public Library, City Central Library, Physical Accessibility, Assistive Technology, India.

Introduction

In the society everyone is expected to conform to certain standards. How one looks is often stimulates how one treated. discrimination on the basis of the physical appearance is common thing in the society. The community of differently abled persons is one such community, which faces discrimination based on these factors. Disability is human condition. In overcoming these discriminations, Information plays very important role because, information is a tool which enables human beings to function as active members of society. Moreover, it is a basic human right to be able to have access to information. There is no better institution than public library to do this job since it is the local centre of information making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. The public library is most democratic institution in nature with its free services and access to all without any discrimination. It also acts as agency of change for social and personal development moreover, can be a positive agency for change in the community. The public library should be aware of the issues that are being discussed within the community and provide information that will inform that debate. Hence, public libraries can play an indispensable role in satisfying information needs of differently abled persons as they are struggling to get required information in accessible formats because of economic and social problems. Therefore, present study is under taken to analyze the current usage and perception of differently abled persons towards public library in general, and resources and services in particular.

Literature Review

Hicken (2004) argues that public libraries must play a bigger role as democratic institution if they want to meet the challenge of social exclusion. Beaton (2005) elaborates how public libraries can make attempts to meet the challenge of providing services to differently abled persons with accessible services. Cylke, Moodle and Fistic (2007) reveal that, differently abled persons have the same interests, intellectual capacity, and ambitions as any other persons of society. Koulikourdi (2008) recommends for collections in alternative formats and assistive devices along with adaptations in legislation. Burke (2009) suggests that more comprehensive research should be carried to assess the perceptions of differently abled persons on public library access and services. Lewis (2013) confirms that, there is enormous demand from differently abled persons for equal public library services. Kaeding (2014) stressed on the need for further

research to understand the issues of access to public libraries for children with special needs and their families. Slater (2014) suggests that, to better serve hearing impaired children, public libraries need to develop their collections and programs. Ciccone (2018) shine light on the decision to integrate services of public libraries to deliver within their own capacities has really benefited the visually impaired Canadians.

Objectives

1. To recognize different categories of differently abled persons who visit City Central Library, Dharwad.
2. To ascertain the different information needs of differently abled persons.
3. To know whether differently abled persons get adequate and access to resources and services in City Central Library.
4. To know whether differently abled persons are able to satisfy their information needs with resources and services of public library or not.
5. To identify problems faced by the differently abled persons in using the City Central Library and its resources and services.
6. To give suggestions for improvements of collection and services to better serve differently abled persons.

Methodology

Keeping the objectives of the study in mind, a well structured questionnaire was constructed and distributed among differently abled persons of different categories, using simple random sampling method. Total 50 questionnaires were distributed and 46 questionnaires were received back with response rate of 92%. In that, 43 (86%) questionnaires were found to be suitable for analysis. To distribute questionnaires, personal visits were made to City Central Library, Colleges, Hostels and other places in Dharwad to find differently abled persons. Obtained data was put to excel worksheet for better analysis and understanding the desired objectives set for the study.

Analysis and interpretation

Table-1: Gender-wise Distribution of Respondents

SL. No	Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Male	31	72.09
2	Female	12	27.91
Total		43	100

Table 1 Shows gender wise distribution of respondents. Out of 43 differently abled persons surveyed, 31 (72.09%) are male and 12 (27.91%) are female. It can be noticed from the table that male respondents are more compared to female respondents.

Table-2: Age-wise Distribution of Respondents

SL. No	Age	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Under 18	4	9.30
2	18-30	20	46.51
3	31-45	12	27.91
4	46-60	5	11.63
5	Above 60	2	4.65
Total		43	100

Table 2 depicts age wise distribution of respondents. Out of 43 differently abled persons surveyed, only 4 (9.30%) respondents were under the age of 18. Further, 20 (46.51%) respondents belonged to the age group between 18-30. While, 12 (27.91%) belonged to the age group between 31- 45. Whereas only 5 (11.63%) and 2 (4.65%) respondents were belonged to age group of 46-60 and above 60 respectively. It can be noticed that respondents who participated in the survey were mostly young and aged between 18-45 i.e. 74.42%.

Table-3: Educational Qualification-wise Distribution of Respondents

SL. No	Education Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	SSLC or Less	12	27.91
2	PUC/ Diploma/ITI	15	34.88
3	Degree	11	25.58
4	Post Graduation	5	11.63
Total		43	100

Table 3 reveals educational qualification wise distribution of respondents. Majority of the respondents' i.e. 15 (34.88%) have completed their PUC/Diploma/ITI and 12 (27.91%) respondents have just Completed SSLC or less. 11 (25.58%) respondents have completed Degree and only 5 (11.63%) have completed Post Graduation. It can be noticed that majority of the respondents studied only up to SSLC, PUC/ Diploma/ITI (62.79%).

Table- 4: Disability-Type wise Distribution of Respondents

SL. No	Nature of Disability	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Physical Disability	27	62.79
2	Visual Disability	9	20.93
3	Hearing/Speech Disability	5	11.63
4	Mental Disability	2	4.65
Total		43	100

Table 4 shows the disability- type wise distribution of respondents. Out of 43 differently abled persons surveyed, 27 (62.79%) were physically disabled, 9 (20.93%) were visually disabled. Whereas 5 (11.63%) and 2 (4.65%) respondents were Hearing/Speech Disabled and mentally disabled respectively. It can be noticed that majority of the respondents were physically disabled (62.79%).

Table-5: Visit to City Central Library

SL. No	CCL Visit	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	11	25.28
2	No	32	74.42
Total		43	100

Table 5 shows how many differently abled respondents visit CCL. Out of 43 persons' surveyed it is shocking to know that only 11 (25.28%) respondents said that they visit CCL. Whereas 32 (74.42%) said they do not visit CCL. The data confirms that majority of differently abled persons do not use public library services.

Table 6: Disability Type wise Distribution of Respondents (CCL users)

SL. No	CCL visitors	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Physical Disability	11	25.58
2	Visual Disability	0	0

3	Hearing/Speech Disability	0	0
4	Mental Disability	0	0
Total		11	25.58

Table 6 shows disability type wise distribution of respondents who use public library services. data shows that only physically disabled persons use public library and that number is also very less i.e. 11 (25.58%). More importantly, persons with hearing/speech disability, visual disability and mental disability do not visit CCL. It can be observed from the table that only physically disabled persons visit CCL.

Table-7: Information Needs of Differently abled Persons

Sl. No	Information Needs	No. of Responses	Percentage (%)
1	Employment	37	86.05
2	Educational	31	72.09
3	Government Policies/Programs	29	67.44
4	Political	20	46.51
5	Entertainment, leisure	19	44.19
6	Business	17	39.53
7	Agricultural	8	18.60
8	Others	5	11.63

Table 7 shows the information needs of respondents. Information needs of differently abled persons are mainly related to Employment i.e. 37 (86.05%), education 31 (72.09%) and Government Policies/Programs 29 (67.44%). Followed by Political 20 (46.51%), Entertainment 19 (44.19%) and Business 17 (39.53%). Whereas information needs related to agriculture were least required by respondents with only 8 (18.60%). The data in the table confirms that information needs of differently abled persons are same as other abled persons.

Table-8: Information Sources Used by the Respondents other than CCL

SL. No	Information Sources	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Remain un-satisfied	30	69.77
4	Teachers	26	60.47
2	Family Members	23	53.49
5	Friends	15	34.88
3	Other libraries	10	23.26

6	Others	10	23.26
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Table 8 reveals sources of information which are used by respondents other than CCL to satisfy their information needs if they do not visit CCL. In that majority of respondents i.e. 30 (69.77%) said that their information needs remain un-satisfied. 26 (60.47%) respondents said that their teachers are the major source of information. Followed by, Family members i.e. 23 (53.49%) and Friends 15 (34.88%). Only 10 (23.26%) said that they use other libraries. it is observed from table that majority i.e. 69.77% of information needs remain un-satisfied.

Table- 9: Problems Faced by Respondents

SL. No	Problems faced	No. of Responses	Percentage (%)
1	Inaccessibility (Poor Infrastructure)	36	83.72
4	Lack of reading materials in alternative formats	33	76.74
2	Lack of special services	31	72.09
3	Lack of assistive technologies with access to computers	26	60.47
5	Library personnel are not helpful	25	58.14
6	City Central Library is very far from my place (Home)	23	53.49
7	I can't move out of home	13	30.23
8	Others	12	27.91

Table 9 deals with problems faced by the respondents. A question was asked to the differently abled persons who use CCL and also to who do not use or can't use CCL. Majority i.e. 36 (83.72%) respondents said that inaccessibility or poor infrastructure of CCL is the problem. Followed by Lack of reading materials in alternative formats i.e. 33 (76.74%), Lack of special services i.e. 31 (72.09%), Lack of assistive technologies with access to computers i.e. 26 (60.47%), Library personnel are not helpful i.e. 25 (58.14%), City Central Library is very far from my place (Home) i.e. 23 (53.49%). Only few respondents said that they can't move out home i.e. 13 (30.23%). It can be observed that Inaccessibility, Lack of reading materials in alternative formats, special services and Lack of assistive technologies with access to computers are the major problems faced by the differently abled persons.

Major Findings

- It is found from the study that, out of 43 persons surveyed, only 11 (25.28%) are using the City Central Library.
- It is found from the study that, only physically disabled persons are using the City Central Library and that number is also very low (25.58%).
- It is found from the study that, majority i.e. 74.42% of differently abled persons' educational qualification is only up to SSLC/PUC/ Diploma.
- It is found from the study that majority i.e. 69.77%. of differently abled persons said that, their information needs remain un-satisfied.
- It is found from the study that, for 36 (83.72%) differently abled persons, City Central Library is not physically accessible.
- It is found from the study that lack information resources in alternative formats i.e. 33 (76.74) and lack of special services i.e. 31 (72.09%) are the major problems faced by differently abled persons.
- It is found from the study that lack of assistive technologies with access to computers i.e. 26 (60.47%) is another major problem faced by differently abled persons.

Suggestions

- It is suggested to the authorities of CCL that, they should make efforts in the direction of physical accessibility of the library by providing sufficient parking place, ramps, elevators, accessible furniture and accessible toilets etc to accommodate differently abled persons.
- It is also suggested to the authorities of CCL that, not only they have to make sure accessibility from outside the library but also inside the library. Inside the library, all sections should be easily accessible. The space should be rationally arranged with clear signs and symbols. Further, book shelves, Circulation and Reference desks should be at reachable height.
- It is well established that Information needs of differently abled persons are the same as other persons. It is just that they need same information in different (accessible) formats. Hence it suggested that, City Central Library should procure information resources in

alternative formats viz. large print books, Braille books, audio/Talking books and easy to read books etc.

- It is also suggested that, the library should start providing special services like, home delivery of books, books by mail (post), reference services by fax or email and reading service to differently abled persons.
- It is suggested that CCL should procure and provide assistive technologies since; they came as great boon for differently abled persons. The assistive technologies play very important role in satisfying the needs of differently abled persons in the library.

Conclusion

Public library services for differently abled persons in India are not yet available or even expected in near future. Since, public libraries in India are only interested in providing services to the non-differently abled persons ever since the modern idea of public library came into existence. Differently abled persons are the most under served for information services in the society. People here not yet bought or understood the real idea behind the public library. Public library services should be equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status and educational attainment. This means that some ones disability should not be the reason for denial of public library accessibility. Hence provision should be made to ensure services are equally available to differently abled persons, who for some reason are not able to use the conventional resources and services. Public libraries must think from the differently abled persons' perspective and try to satisfy their information needs and help them to overcome information exclusion more particularly, the social exclusion. Further, these steps can not only help differently abled persons stand on their own but also equip them to contribute to the society.

21st century is completely dominated by Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The use of ICT is must in all most all types of libraries; public libraries are not an exception to this. By adopting ICT, City Central Library can improve and render better services to differently abled persons by providing direct access to its resources and services.

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