

Health Challenges of the Library Professionals from Rajasthan, India

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Abstract

The library and information science professionals (LISP) work restless to serve their clientele till the satisfaction level of the procurement of the information desired by the users. The services of LSIP are beyond the acquisition of the information material. These are the continuous efforts for the preservation of the resources from the dust, molds, insects (silverfish, termites etc.), climatic factors (high temperature, humidity) and other types of physical damages like brittleness of the papers, tearing of books, breaking down of hard materials (like CDs) etc. The LISP performs various types of activities which include spray of chemicals (like pesticides, preservatives) and digitization of old books. All these activities result into the health challenges among the human resources in form of the librarians and other library staff. The health issues are mostly related to the allergy and the respiratory problems along with other common physical concerns like headache, blood pressure, back pain, obesity, facial skin damage etc. which leads to the serious ailments viz. cancer, cardiac arrest.

The present investigation is an attempt to review of the health challenges drawn from the observations on the randomly selected hundred LISPs from the state of Rajasthan (India). A short survey through the semi-structured interviews was undertaken to observe the general physical aspects (BMI) of the respondents along with the associated ailments (based on response without any medical reports).

The result indicated the lower proportion of the normal BMI among the respondents. Besides, every LISP was suffering from one or more kind of the ailment. Backache was the most common among the LISPs.

The inference drawn from the review investigation indicated that the policy for the LISPs with primary focus on the health is the need of the time for the academic libraries of the developing nations.

Keywords: Information resources; Library and Information Science Professionals (LISP); Ailments; Rajasthan

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Introduction

A library is a place where information resources are available in different formats for use. The information resources like books, periodicals, maps, microforms, audio and video tapes, electronic resources etc. are the common types of resources available to meet the requirements of the user. These information resources are procured and stacked for use. Further, the Library is a place where not only a collection of information resources, electronic equipments and ICT Gadgets are available to access the

information, but a team of skilled professionals is also available to serve the users with maximum dedication and enthusiasm. With the advancement of the information age, librarians are known as information professionals and the libraries are evaluated as information centres [1]. Thus, library management and librarianship are highly skilled activities performed by the professionally qualified personnel could be categorized as Library and Information Science Professional (LSIP).

LSIP perform a wide range of activities. The assigned responsibilities

differ from the size of library and human resource. The job might be performed single handedly in small libraries and specifically in large libraries. Besides acquisition of the information, the management of healthy and hygienic environment which otherwise turned out to be dusty, dampening, odorous, affecting the resources as well as employed humans. To prevent from damage preservation of resources from high temperature, humidity, dust, molds, silverfish and termites and similar insects, various types of activities are performed viz. spray of pesticides and digitization of old books [2]. During the course of performing such activities, LSIP encounters a number of health and safety hazards. These hazards include mental and physical challenges such as psychological stress, slip risk, falls, injury, respiratory issues, etc. The chemicals used for preservation or maintenance of the resources could further deteriorate the conditions. Some of the ailments or diseases observed among Librarians and Library professionals are respiratory allergy problems, headache, blood pressure, back pain, obesity, lung cancer, heart attack, facial skin damage and others.

Although safety hazards related to the physical characteristics of a chemical can be objectively defined in terms of testing requirements (e.g. flammability), health hazard definitions are less precise and more subjective. Health hazards may cause measurable changes in the body-such as decreased pulmonary function. These changes are generally indicated by the occurrence of signs and symptoms in the exposed employees - such as shortness of breath, a non-measurable, subjective feeling. Employees exposed to such hazards must be apprised of both the change in body function and the signs and symptoms that may occur to signal that change. LSIP are mostly exposed to such type of risks.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of the present investigation was to review the major health challenges among the library professionals through sample survey of the LISPs from the academic libraries of Rajasthan (India) and to enumerate the ailments at the first level based on the observations from the daily routine of the persons employed instead of the medical reports.

Methodology

The investigation was based on the comprehensive review of related literature and informal semi-structured interviews with the library professionals. The information gathered with the purpose to explore the perceptions, opinions and observation regarding the health problems and challenges confronted by the humans engaged in library profession.

Table 2 BMI of the respondents.

BMI of Respondent						
Sr. No.	BMI Analysis	Male Respondent		Female Respondent		Total Respondent
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
1	Normal	16	25.40	15	40.54	31
2	Near to Obesity	27	42.86	15	40.54	42
3	Overweight	20	31.75	7	18.92	27
	TOTAL	63	100.00	37	100	100

The observations were collected from the randomly selected 100 library professionals without any bias for gender including male and female irrespective of the age from various Library and Information Centres. The physical parameters of the individual respondents were collected to analyze Body Mass Index (BMI) or Quetelet Index. BMI was derived from the mass (weight) divided by the square of the height of the individual which is expressed in kg/m². LISPs were categorized as per the international standard BMI Classification [3].

Observations

The hundred randomly selected respondents included 63 male and 37 female library and information science professionals (**Table 1**) from various libraries and information centres of Rajasthan (India). The selection was random irrespective of the institute or library or any particular site. Further, the data collection was independent of the age of the LISPs. The physical features were noted to analyze BMI of the respondents (**Table 2**). Based on the respondents' sufferings in form of physical ailments or diseases, observations were undertaken for the respondents (**Table 3**). **Table 4** categorized the ailments or the diseases of the LISPs either observed from the respondents or the reviewed literature. The stress is a common response from the LISP, but it had not been undertaken into ailment or disease [4,5].

Results & Discussion

Results of interview indicate that library professionals are facing health problems while serving the library. From the observations on the height and the weight of the respondents, BMI was calculated for the respondents. Notably the normal category of the BMI accounted only 31% and 27% were overweight. The proportion of the near to obesity was 42%. People are generally considered obese when their BMI is over 30 kg/m², with the range 25-30 kg/m² defined as overweight. According to Kopelman [6] overweight and obesity are defined as abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that may impair health. Large number of health problems is associated with the overweight and obesity, both independently and in association with other diseases. These are among the most significant contributors to ill health [7].

According to the report of WHO [3] on "Occupational health

Table 1 Genderwise response.

Sr. No.	Respondents	Numbers
1	Male	63
2	Female	37
	Total	100

Table 3 Physical ailment/s among the respondents.

Physical Ailment/s among Respondent						
Sr. No.	Ailment/ Disease	Male Respondent		Female Respondent		Total Respondent
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
1	Low Blood Pressure	17	26.98	24	64.86	41
2	High Blood Pressure	32	50.79	12	32.43	44
3	Headache	52	82.54	32	86.49	84
4	Backache	45	71.43	35	94.59	80
5	Cardiac attacks	10	15.87	2	5.41	12
6	Respiratory Problems	38	60.32	15	40.54	53
7	Skin problems	9	14.29	24	64.86	33
8	Allergy	54	85.71	18	48.65	72
9	Ophthalmologic problem	57	90.48	29	78.38	86
10	Others	52	82.54	30	81.08	82

Table 4 Categories of common disease found among LISPs.

Psychological disorders	Chest infections and respiratory system allergies	Dermatological inflammations and skin allergies	Orthopaedic and muscular disorders
Depression	Tuberculosis	Atopic dermatitis (eczema), Urticaria	Discal hernia, lumbar hernia
Stress, Tension	bronchial asthma, allergic rhinitis or sneeze	Allergic conjunctivitis	Tendonitis and Tenosinovitis; Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

training manual for primary health care workers”, occupational health problems have gradually increased in type and magnitude and have led to or aggravated diseases resulting from exposure to several risk factors, only one of which being the work environment. When gone through the working habits of Library professionals, it was found that upper level management work regularly for 6-8 hours. Middle level professionals work 5-7 hours continue and at bottom level, professionals work for 4-6 hours continuously. The stress was the common attribute in the personality of the LISPs as observed from a small sample in the present investigation. The stress though unclassified in any ailment or disease but studied to the great extent by several workers in this field. The ‘stress’ could be a result from work pressures, rigid schedule, non-supportive staff, critical hierarchy and a host of other irritating factors. Haridasan and Sultan [8], in their survey examine the extent of Occupational Stress felt by the library staff of the Gorakhpur University. The main objectives of the study were to identify the role of different dimensions of stress experienced by the library staff working in different levels in the organization, to study the personal factors causing the burnout among library staff etc. Data were collected by sending questionnaire to library staff of the university. 62 staff were investigated for ascertaining their stress experience. A few of the findings are, the librarians are under stress as they are affected by role overload, role conflict, unreasonable group and political pressure and under participation, the librarian also experience high burn out on the emotional exhaustion dimension. Junior professional assistants also experienced high degree of burnout on the emotional exhaustion etc. Sornam and Sudha [9] studied the level of Occupational Role Stress (ORS) among women library professionals working in Bharathidasan University in Tamil Nadu. Objectives of the study were to identify the influence of age, experience, marital status on ORS and to find out the extent of association between selected socio demographic variables and ORS. The scoring pattern was done in a five-point mode

ranging from 0-4 and the Median, ChiSquare test, Karl Pearson’s Co-efficient of Correlation and Students t-test were used as statistical Tools. The study identified that age, experience and marital status have significant association with ORS. Routray and Satpathy [10] described the types of stress in digital library environment and broadly divided them into: Technological, Physical, Mental and Situational. Technological stress was described as the stress due to the development and application of information technologies among the library and information professionals. Due to rapid change in computer hardware and software, obsolescence of existing hardware and software is a common phenomenon in almost all libraries. Thus, there is the necessity to keep pace with the changing technologies which due to financial, time or technological constraints, it is difficult to do. Stress management was studied by several workers through Holistic Stress Management Technique (HSMT) [11].

Mahalakshmi and Sornam [12] studied the effect of technology on library professionals of engineering colleges of Anna University, Coimbatore, by examining the dimensions of: 1) Demographical details 2) Perceptions of technology, which includes emotional reactions to technology and replacement of people by technology. The study undertaken by Togia A [13] mainly includes to measure the levels of burnout among Greek Academic librarians and to assess its relationship with certain background characteristics. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was administered to 136 academic librarians across Greece. The study suggested that respondents experienced low levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and moderate levels of personal accomplishment. Of the background characteristics, age, number of years as a librarian and participation in decision making were found to be independent of the burnout experienced.

Regular sitting may cause backache, eye problems, and headache and hyperacidity problems. Librarians in ICT age are working with information and communication gadgets too. It has been

proved that use of computer systems are as harmful for human, as they may suffer from Musculoskeletal problems, Repetitive stress injury, Vision problems, Headache, Stress disorders. The chronic obstructive pulmonary disease which is mainly caused by smoking may be aggravated by irritant gases or dusts in the workplace like dusty environment of the library. Low back pain syndrome has several risk factors including rheumatic disorders, scoliosis and inappropriate posture at work.

Conclusion

As it has been noted, all the general measures to prevent occupational diseases related to the archive and library professions can be adopted by them, archivists and librarians using their own means, most of the times. Because of this, the only thing one should do to protect health, in the first place, to protect their records and to raise profile in the eyes of administrators and staff in other departments is to raise the professional standards, in effect by doing job properly in the organization that one work for. When performed for a long time, tasks in storage areas are known to cause physical fatigue, tasks in offices are known to cause mental fatigue and tasks in user help desks are known to cause spiritual fatigue. So, staff should be rotated to different departments, allowing them to perform different tasks, every one or two weeks. Staff should be allowed to take short breaks a few times a day

in staff common rooms, allowing them to interact and exchange ideas with their colleagues.

The occupational health hazards of information professionals can be listed under four main headings:

1. Chest infections and respiratory system allergies;
2. Dermatological inflammations and skin allergies;
3. Orthopedic and muscular disorders and
4. Psychological disorders.

Almost all of the occupational diseases listed can be avoided by

1. A suitable design of the building and the environmental ambience;
Proper natural light and ventilation
Ideal Temperature should be 23°C to 32°C
1. Proper maintenance and care of the building and its contents
Prevention from dust, termites and water leakage
2. Good working practices.

Stress free working environment, rotation of work, proper distribution of work as per skills and over all relaxing activities may be help for healthy life of Library professionals.

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